SPECIAL
SRI LANKA ISSUE

Oriental Bird Club

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The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

- encourage an interest in the birds of the Oriental region and their conservation
- liaise with and promote the work of existing regional societies
- collate and publish material on Oriental birds

Two bulletins and a journal, *Forktail*, are published annually

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Membership of the Club is open to all and for 1997 costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

OBC Web Site

http://www.netlink.co.uk/users/aw/obchome.html

Cover illustration:

Sri Lanka Blue Magpie (Ceylon Blue Magpie) *Urocissa ornata* by G. M. Henry. Originally issued as one of the illustrations in *Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon* (1927-1935), 4 parts. Read more about this historic publication in Priyantha Wijesinghe's article. Reproduced with kind permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland and the Reverend Bruce Henry.

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Club News

Diary Dates

Saturday 13th December 1997, AGM - Zoological Society of London Meeting Room, Outer Circle, Regents Park, London NW1, UK

The three speakers at this year's annual meeting will take us on a journey round the highlands and islands of the Orient.

The Roof of the World is the destination for Tim Worfolk who will talk about the birds of Tibet and Qinghai. Tim illustrated the recent Pica Press book on *Shrikes* and has also done the plates for the forthcoming field guide to the birds of Sri Lanka.

The World's Largest Archipelago is the subject of Paul Jepson's talk. Strung out across 5,000 km of equatorial Asia, the 17,500 islands which make up Indonesia are home to 402 restricted-range bird species, more than any other country in the world. And Paul, who until this year ran the BirdLife Indonesia office, has seen most of them.

Our third speaker, Otto Pfister, will return us to the highlands with a lecture on the *Birds of Ladakh*, the Indian state which is home to the Black-necked Crane.

In addition, there'll be the usual 'Oriental bazaar' of sales stalls including OBC goods, NHBS books, WildSounds CDs and tapes and the customary delicious food from our dedicated catering officer. The Mega Prize Draw will also be made during the course of the meeting. Please try to sell as many tickets as you can on our behalf for this, one of our major fund raising activities.

Saturday 7th February 1998, Joint meeting with Dutch Birding, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Following our successful link-up with Dutch Birding on their home ground in 1995, we're delighted to repeat the experience. The day-long conference has a projected line-up of talks by Jaripel Tomaki on the field identification of Palearctic buntings, Ian Burrows on the birds of Papua New Guinea, and Paul Jepson on Indonesia. There'll also be a Mystery Bird Competition, a review of the birding year in the Netherlands and sales stands featuring OBC and Dutch Birding goods, optics, books and the Dutch Birding Trip Reports Service. On the Sunday it is hoped there'll be a day's birding on the polders for wildfowl and raptors. The OBC is planning to take a coachload of members across the North Sea for the weekend, if there is sufficient interest. If you are keen to go, call Nigel Redman on 01580-879566.

Bird Fair Update

The British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water in August is now a firm annual fixture for the Club and this year was our most successful yet. We raised just under £3,500 from sales of OBC goods, membership subscriptions and a raffle. This is money which can now be awarded as grants from the OBC Conservation Fund. The main raffle prize was a pair of 8x32 binoculars generously donated by LEICA. Barrie Kehoe of Leica can be seen drawing the winning ticket with Promotions Officer Richard Eden. The binoculars were won by Roger Williams of Manchester.

LEICA

Special thanks go to Tim Loseby for his efforts at the Bird Fair. Not only did Tim give the OBC Lecture on *Birds of Southern India* on all three days of the fair, but he also provided ten superb mounted prints of Oriental birds for our photo gallery which drew many admirers to our stand. The OBC is also grateful to Morten Strange and Lan Owyong, who also provided pictures for the gallery. All the photos are for sale and can next be viewed at the AGM in London.

We should also like to thank all those Council members and volunteers who manned the stand under near tropical conditions. In particular we should like to thank Richard Bosanquet, Brian Sykes, Margaret Sykes, Adrian Pitches, Richard Eden, Freda Edan, Ethelyn Eden, Graeme Spinks, Mike Blair, Phil Benstead and Steve Rowlands.

Corporate Sponsor News

Leica was not the only corporate sponsor showing generous support to the OBC at the Bird Fair.

Birding holiday company, and new corporate sponsor, LIMOSA also made a big contribution to our conservation efforts with a substantial donation of £765. This money will fully fund a survey of the Green-billed Coucal in Sri Lanka, which is endemic to the island. For further details of this project see page 5.

Richard Eden is pictured again – this time receiving the cheque from Chris Kightley of LIMOSA.

We are also delighted to welcome Swedish birding tour company AviFauna as another new corporate sponsor. AviFauna is Scandinavia's leading bird-tour operator, with 20 years experience in global birding. AviFauna is run by the Swedish Ornithological Society, BirdLife's partner in Sweden. The 1998 program includes trips to Bulgaria, Tibet, Oman and The Gambia.

The OBC is extremely grateful for the most generous sponsorship received from the Ceylon Tourist Board (CTB) in Colombo. Their support has fully funded the production of the Bulletin Supplement: probably the most definitive Sri Lankan birdwatching site guide to date with extensive use of colour photographs and written by Sri Lankan authors. CTB will be distributing 1,000 copies of the Supplement through their network of offices around the world. The OBC is proud to enrol the Ceylon Tourist Board as a Corporate Sponsor, the first from the Indian Subcontinent.

The Sri Lanka Special Bulletin has also attracted the support of Jetwing Hotels Ltd in the form of a £500 sponsorship of the colour centre spread in the Supplement. Among their 12 hotels is the Yala Safari Beach Hotel which is outside the boundary of Yala, Sri Lanka's most visited national park. They also own the Hunas Falls Hotel, Kandy, good for birding, from which excursions can be arranged to the Wasgomuwa National Park and Corbett's Gap in the Knuckles. Jetwing Hotels have also been enrolled as an OBC Corporate Sponsor.

Limosa

The OBC is also very grateful to bird tour company BIRDQUEST who have generously donated £500 to fund the Swamp Francolin survey in the Indian terai. Further details of this project will be announced in the next edition of the Bulletin.

BIRDQUEST

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Council Comings and Goings

The following Council members have indicated their intention to stand down at the AGM: Mike Blair, Richard Bosanquet, Nona Finch, Melanie Heath, Colin Poole, Simon Stirrup. Their fellow Council members would like to thank them on behalf of the Club for their efforts. Former Chairman Nigel Redman has graciously offered to perform this role for a further year during which time a long-term replacement will be found. Our long-serving Treasurer, Graeme Spinks, has now done that job for four years which, under the Club's constitution, is the limit for continuous service in any Council post. However, we wish to retain Graeme's indispensible accountancy skills for a further year and Council will be asking the AGM to vote on varying our constitution to allow this to happen. Council is also nominating Phil Benstead, Debbie Pain, Nigel Collar, Krys Kazmierczak, Marcus Kohler and Margaret Sykes for election at the AGM. Nigel Collar is an eminent scientist at BirdLife International and lead author of *Birds to Watch 2*, the directory of the world's threatened birds. Marcus Kohler has already been co-opted onto Council to understudy Melanie Heath as Conservation Officer, and Margaret Sykes is another co-optee, undertaking the Membership Database cultivated by Richard Bosanquet. Phil Benstead and Debbie Pain are both co-opted onto the Conservation Committee. Krys Kazmierczak has a deep interest in the birds of the Oriental region.

A Request

The Club is seeking a qualified accountant to assist Graeme Spinks, OBC Treasurer. Graeme's workload has increased substantially as the Club has expanded and the funds generated for conservation have grown. Somehow Graeme also finds time for another job as accountant to a major UK company!

Birds of Burma

Two copies of this pioneering work by Bertram Smythies remain in the Club's possession and are available to the highest bidder. The author has generously donated them to the OBC from his own library so that we can sell them to boost our Conservation Fund.

Copy 1 is a First Edition published by the American Baptist Mission Press in Rangoon in 1940. It's in very good condition and inscribed by the author to his parents. Only 2,000 copies were printed. They were subsequently destroyed in an air raid on Japan.

Copy 2 is a Second Edition published by Oliver and Boyd in Edinburgh in 1953. This is in excellent condition and again inscribed to his parents by the author. Bertram Smythies had to rewrite the book completely in 1948 following the loss of his first edition stock.The books will be available for inspection – and purchase – at the AGM on 13th December but sealed bids in envelopes marked *Birds of Burma* can be sent to the OBC address at the Lodge beforehand. OBC Council has reserve prices for the books and bids will be matched to these.

100th OBC Conservation Grant

The Conservation Committee awarded this year the Club's 100th grant from the Conservation Fund. It is for the study of crane migration through the wetlands of Lakki Marwat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan in Pakistan. It's here that three species of crane – Common *Grus grus*, Demoiselle *G. virgo* and Siberian *G. leucogeranus* – run the gauntlet of hunters as they migrate between northern India and breeding grounds in northern Eurasia. Researchers will study the routes the cranes follow, talk to the hunters and attempt to draw up a conservation plan which prevents the cranes being hunted unsustainably. The 100th grant took OBC spending on conservation in the Orient to more than £50,000. Indeed by the end of 1997, the sum will substantially exceed that and we'll be well on our way to our 120th Conservation Grant. Clearly, much of this money, comes from our many corporate sponsors who have generously supported us over the past decade – and from members' subscritions and donations. Thank you all.

Corrigendum

In the item about 'Nesting ecology of island breeding birds', *OBC Bull* 25: 12 the name of the state in which the survey of birds in Chambal Sanctuary is to take place is wrongly given as Uranachal Pradesh. It should read Madhya Pradesh.

Conservation Fund

Compiled by Conservation Committe Members

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Distribution of the Green-billed Coucal in Sri Lanka

Limosa

A generous grant of £765 from LIMOSA will fund an 18-month survey of the Green-billed Coucal *Centropus chlororhynchos* to be carried out by Kithsiri Gunawardena, Deepal Warakagoda and Upali Ekanayake. The species, which is endemic to Sri Lanka, is currently known to be restricted to the tropical wet evergreen forests in the south-west of the island up to an altitude of 760 m. According to ornithologists, last century its distribution also formerly extended north and east of its present known range. Due to the bird's skulking habits it was hardly met with or was overlooked by birdwatchers in the past. It is only during the last two decades, with the increase of interest in birdwatching, that sightings have been regularly made, but these are mainly from the few most popular birding areas which lie well within the species's current known range. Some forests with suitable habitats both inside and outside this range have not been surveyed by birdwatchers. The objectives are to survey these forests and other possible habitats. All forest patches within the study area will be identified using maps and the species will be mainly surveyed using sound recordings of its calls since it is a shy bird which inhabits undergrowth. Conservation measures will be proposed and submitted to the relevant authorities in Sri Lanka.

Bird diversity in Kiralakelle wetland, Sri Lanka

Dr W.W.D.A. Gunawardena from the University of Ruhuna has been awarded a grant of £200 to study the diversity of birds in the Kiralakelle marsh in Sri Lanka. This wetland covers an area of about 700 ha and is located in the Niwala river basin on the coastal plains of Sri Lanka's wet zone. The study will be conducted by members of the Ruhuna University Bird Club. There is currently no available scientific data for this wetland. One outcome of the project will be to help planners formulate land use policies to protect the wetland. Another important aim of the project will be to train undergraduates from the university in fieldwork. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has kindly agreed to donate four pairs of binoculars for use by the Ruhuna University Bird Club.

Survey for the Lesser Florican in the Malwa Plateau, Madhya Pradesh

Ravi Sankaran has been awarded another grant of £500 to continue his work on conserving the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* in 1997. This conservation effort has made significant progress in parts of the florican's breeding range (Gujarat and Rajasthan). However the Malwa Plateau region of Madhya Pradesh has only been surveyed once, during 1994. This region is perhaps the most important part of the florican's breeding range and there is therefore an urgent need to survey this area at the micro level, to identify new areas for conservation and to establish the Florican Watch at the village level in important florican areas. The Florican Watch is a plan already initiated in Gujarat and Rajasthan which involves non-governmental organisations and individuals in florican protection. The objectives of the new study are to 1) assess the species's status; 2) identify target areas for grassland restoration; 3) establish the Florican Watch in Madhya Pradesh, and to advocate State Government support for the conservation strategy. The methods used over the past three years, which have proved effective in Lesser Florican conservation, will be used during this survey as well. This essentially means locating a florican site by seeking protected grasslands, surveying it to find out how many floricans are present, and then interacting with locals in the nearby villages, distributing posters, and identifying and motivating an individual who will undertake protection of the species in his area.

Threatened species of Nameri Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam

A small grant of £500 has been awarded to Dr Prasanta Kumar Saikia to study the threatened species of Nameri Wildlife Sanctuary. The Sanctuary is poorly known but populations of White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* and Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* are known to occur. These two species are to be targeted and surveyed. In the case of the duck this will involve tape-playback along fixed transects. This is possibly the first time that this technique has been used in the field, although it has been shown to elicit a response from captive birds. Additionally the project hopes to raise awareness amongst local people about the importance of the Sanctuary.

Harike Lake waterfowl survey, Punjab

Mihir Devare has been awarded a small grant to undertake a waterfowl survey of the large Harike Lake wetland complex in Punjab. The project will concentrate on the Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* population of the lake; estimating the population, identifying breeding areas, and studying general ecology, behaviour and movements. Additionally the project will assess the population and distribution of another threatened bird occurring in the area, the Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni*, as well as looking at the status of Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* at the lake. The Oriental Bird Club is grateful to Per Undeland for funding this project.

Cheer Pheasant study in Himachal Pradesh

A generous grant of £500 donated by AviFauna has been awarded to Dr Rajiv S. Kalsi to study Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii* in Shimla, Chamba and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh, India. Dr Kalsi will be undertaking dawn counts to calculate density indices and will also be studying the habitat associations of this species. Cheer Pheasants typically occur on grassy slopes at mid-altitude and are therefore often found near villages. Information on hunting pressure and other land uses in the pheasant's habitat will also be collected. In the past Dr Kalsi has undertaken research on Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*, Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, Grey Francolin *F. pondicerianus* and Black Francolin *F. francolinus*.

Announcement of wildlife reserve

The Ceylon Bird Club are pleased to announce that the Annaivilundawa tanks in Puttalam district, Sri Lanka, have been declared a wildlife sanctuary. They consist of seven small shallow irrigation tanks which constitute the Rattambala Oya Irrigation Scheme and their immediate surroundings, 60 km north of Colombo. Annaivilundawa is of international importance for birds and is listed as a Ramsar Site. The designation of the site as a wildlife sanctuary follows a comprehensive avifaunal survey of the wetland carried out by members of the Ceylon Bird Club, funded by OBC (*OBC Bull.* 21: 13-14).

CONSERVATION FUND IN ACTION

Status and conservation of Lesser Florican, India

The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*, a bustard endemic to the Indian subcontinent, is critically endangered. Its population declined from an estimated 4,500 birds in the early 1980s to about 2,200 in 1994. An integrated conservation effort is urgently required if this species is to be saved from extinction. The Lesser Florican breeds in western and eastern Gujarat, south-eastern Rajasthan and western Madhya Pradesh. It breeds in grasslands protected from livestock-grazing for the production of hay. These protected grasslands are a traditional part of agrarian systems of western India. Despite their economic importance, protected grasslands are under tremendous human pressure, both from livestock over-grazing and conversion to agriculture, and fodder shortages are now severe. The Lesser Florican is an indicator of the health of grasslands. By focusing on this species, the extent and quality of protected fodder-producing grasslands in western India has been assessed. The finding has been that the area under protected grasslands is inadequate for the survival of this species, and to meet local fodder demands. What makes the Lesser Florican so special is that its requirements coincide with human needs. Its survival calls for a continuation of traditional management practices.

More important, its survival is dependent on an increase in protected grasslands which will result in an increase in fodder production. Thus the conservation of the Lesser Florican is a reconciliation of human needs and the prevention of extinction. The OBC Conservation Fund has provided several grants to help fund the Lesser Florican conservation effort. The first two grants (each £500) were provided by CYGNUS WILDLIFE and PER UNDELAND and contributed to the funding of a short-term project 'Status survey and conservation planning for the Lesser Florican in Western India'. This was initiated with the objectives of assessing the status of the Lesser Florican in the monsoon of 1994, and organising a workshop at Vadodara, Gujarat. This workshop had three objectives: to a) formulate a conservation strategy; b) generate awareness; c) identify action groups at the district level who would be able to create an inventory of protected grasslands in their districts, identify priority conservation areas and educate people on why grasslands need to be protected. There were two major outputs of this workshop. First, an action plan was prepared, documenting the various remedial measures that need to be undertaken to conserve the Lesser Florican and its economically important grassland habitat. Second, the Florican Watch was constituted with the objectives of a) identifying areas important for the species, and making an inventory of protected grasslands; b) identifying and motivating an individual at the village level who would protect the Lesser Florican around this village; c) educating people on the conservation and sustainable use of grasslands. In 1995 and 1996, the Florican Watch undertook a widespread campaign through the distribution of posters in Hindi and Gujarathi, and by publishing articles. A more detailed account of the results and conservation achievements of this phase o f the conservation effort is given in *OBC Bull.* 22: 42-45.

While the workshop at Gujarat addressed a wider audience, it was felt that there was a need for a series of workshops and surveys that addressed Lesser Florican conservation in each state/district. This was most urgently felt for Rajasthan. Although Rajasthan has historically had a large number of floricans visiting it, there has been very little effort to identify important florican areas in the state, or create widespread awareness. On 28th July 1996, a workshop was held at Kota with the theme conservation of the Lesser Florican in Rajasthan, followed by a survey to identify important florican areas in the state. OBC contributed two more small grants in 1996 (total £800) to help fund this phase of the work. Although the florican was once a common monsoon visitor to many parts of eastern, southern and central Rajasthan, between 1994 and 1996 it was only found to occur in isolated pockets in its former breeding range. Throughout most of this region floricans mostly occur in ones and twos. The latest survey found that only four locations are now known to have a fairly sizeable population of floricans during the monsoon.

Grasslands in Rajasthan are either privately owned or owned by the Forest Department. Privately owned grasslands are either protected for their fodder, or are leased exclusively to a few cattle graziers. Currently all Forest Department grasslands are protected from livestock-grazing from 1st July to 1st October, during which period the grasslands are auctioned. After 1st October the lessee is permitted either to cut fodder, or to graze the grassland. However, most of these grasslands are not optimally managed and are being grazed throughout the monsoon. A weed *Prosopis juliflora* has invaded most grasslands, and this constitutes their biggest management problem. In addition to habitat loss and degradation, floricans are threatened by hunting which continues to be a major problem throughout their breeding range, and more particularly in Rajasthan. In the monsoon of 1996, I know that at least 18-20 Lesser Floricans were shot in the areas I surveyed. The workshop made detailed site-specific recommendations for the future management of Rajasthan's grasslands, both for Lesser Floricans and for people. These included the protection of grasslands from 1st July to 1st October by specially appointed local people. Grazing may be permitted after the grass is

Lesser Florican Sypheotides indica
by Hil Bruinsma

harvested. Tree plantations should be strictly prohibited. Lastly, weeds such as *Prosopis juliflora* should be eradicated.

Ravi Sankaran

Bird survey of Kaziranga National Park, India

A small grant of £500 funded a series of bird surveys of Kaziranga National Park in Assam between 1993 and 1995. During this period approximately 60% of the 430 km^2 park was visited. Kaziranga is one of the largest unspoilt areas in the Brahmaputra floodplain and consists of a mixture of mixed moist deciduous forest, grassland, wetlands and dry scrubby areas. Kaziranga falls within the Assam Plains Endemic Bird Area (EBA 009) and is undoubtedly of very high conservation importance.

The park was surveyed on foot and from boats, elephants and cars. The result is the first comprehensive annotated checklist for the National Park. Of special interest during the survey was the number of globally threatened species that were recorded:

Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*
The breeding population of this very rare and endangered bird was estimated at 25 pairs.

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*
Only three pairs were located during the survey and this species is considered to be in decline within the park.

Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*
The Indian population of this species has declined over the last 20 years; the survey found 150-200 nesting pairs.

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*
Widespread throughout the Oriental region but in a steady decline. The survey recorded 40 active nests of this species.

Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius*
This endangered species formerly ranged widely throughout northern India but is now much reduced. The Brahmaputra Valley is one the few known breeding stations of this species. The survey found 2 breeding pairs and recorded a total of 78 birds during winter visits.

Additionally a number of near-threatened species were recorded, including Derbyan Parakeet *Psittacula derbiana*, Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichtyophaga ichthyaetus* and Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*.

Dr P. C. Bhattacharjee

Catalogue of colonial waterbird nesting sites (heronries) in India.

A small grant of £500 funded the compilation of a catalogue of colonial waterbird nesting sites (heronries) in India. A preliminary report has now been completed. Information was collected by sending out a questionnaire requesting details on heronries to over 700 birdwatchers, ornithologists and naturalists in different parts of India. Details on the location, breeding season, status, nesting site, colony size, and species breeding at the site were requested.

The information available on heronries in published literature was also reviewed. A total of 26 species was included in the heronry survey: Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Indian Cormorant *P. fuscicollis*, Little Cormorant *P. niger*, Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, Chinese Pond Heron *A. bacchus*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*, Eastern Reef Egret *Egretta sacra*, Little Egret *E. garzetta*, Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*, Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Grey Heron *A. cinerea*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*, Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*, Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, Greater Adjutant *L. dubius*, Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*, Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*.

The questionnaire survey and literature review yielded information on 360 active (existing) sites and 173 sites which were once active within Indian limits. This information indicated a distinct concentration of heronries in southern India, western and north-central India and Assam. Little Cormorant, Black-crowned Night Heron, Indian Pond Heron, Cattle Egret and Little Egret were the most common nesting species in the heronries. A clear concentration of heronries was found along the coasts and coastal plains, arid and semi-arid regions, in the Brahmaputra floodplain (with the exception of the river Ganges floodplain) and the Western Ghats. Central India south of the Himalayas, eastern India, including interior Orissa and West Bengal, appeared to be impoverished with respect to nesting sites. A dense concentration of heronries was found along India's east and west coasts indicating that coastal wetlands such as lagoons, backwaters, estuaries, mangroves and mudflats occurring within about 35 km from the coast seem to have a strong influence on nesting site distribution.

An analysis of the frequency and distribution of bird species currently nesting in heronries across different states revealed four distinct groups. Little Cormorant, Indian Pond and Black-crowned Night Herons, Cattle, Little, Intermediate and Great Egrets were the most widespread nesting species. Spot-billed Pelican, Greater and Lesser Adjutant, Woolly-necked Stork, Glossy Ibis and Western Reef Egret were found to have a highly restricted distribution. Great and Indian Cormorants, Purple Heron, Darter and Black Ibis have a partly restricted distribution and the rest of the species were less widespread.

Nesting sites were recorded in as many as 13 different habitat types. Nearly 53% of the observed sites were found either within or close to cities, towns and villages. Only about 31% of the sites were found within or close to fresh waterbodies and around 7% in coastal areas and coastal islands. About 8% of the sites were located within or close to wooded areas. Reedbeds were one of the preferred nesting substrates in the Brahmaputra Valley and Kashmir. Only a few such active reedbed nesting sites were reported.

The affinity to nest at a site or close to a site where they previously nested appears to be very strong. Birds exhibit an

Great Cormorant
Phalacrocorax carbo
by V. Gokula

intense site tenacity at sites where they have enjoyed long years of protection.

The available information showed that Gujarat supports the largest number of heronries in India (over 70 known sites), followed by Assam and Karnataka (around 50 sites) and Kerala with 38 sites. Less than ten heronries were recorded in Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

All the adjutant stork colonies were found to be in Assam. The Lesser Adjutant was once known to nest in Kerala (Travancore), parts of the Malabar coast in the south-west, Orissa and on the east coast. The only recent record of the species outside north-eastern India is at the Bhitarkannika Wildlife Sanctuary.

The survey revealed that the Spot-billed Pelican breeds in about 14 sites distributed over Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. About eleven sites for the species have disappeared in the last 100 years. The bulk of the nesting colonies of Western Reef Egrets were found in Gujarat where they nest in coastal areas. The survey has brought to light the existence of two nesting sites of Western Reef Egrets on the east coast of India. Both are on the coast of Andhra Pradesh, located at the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary and the Lankivanidibba of Krishna estuary.

The number of birds nesting in heronries varies greatly and only a few sites qualify as large heronries. The top ten heronries in India, with over 5,000 pairs or nests, were identified. Only about 7% of the existing heronries were found to be traditional nesting sites and some of these have been in existence for well over a century. However, very few such sites exist today. The main reason for their survival is because of the quality of protection they have enjoyed.

Information on sites where birds once nested is scattered in the published literature. While no information is available on 147 former nesting sites, various reasons were identified for the disappearance of 26 sites.

The survey revealed that only a small proportion of the nesting sites receive protection. In addition to those protected by Forest Departments, several traditional nesting sites are protected by local people, and a few sites enjoy protection due to their occurrence in religious places. Some heronries are inaccessible to people who can harm them, because of their location in government owned areas or on private property, for example. As birds at these sites are little disturbed and the threat to nests is minimal, birds have continued to occupy them regularly over the years.

Issues relating to the conservation of heronries were identified. Bringing more heronries under state (government) protection, total protection from every form of threat or disturbance, protection of roost sites of large waterbirds, and increasing the availability of nesting substrate at existing sites were the most important. Factors leading to the formation of new heronries were also identified. Foreshore afforestation of

Eurasian Spoonbill
Platalea leucorodia
by Martin Woodcock

tanks (man-made pools), availability of partially submerged nesting substrates in large waterbodies, the presence of large waterbodies, and availability of tree-covered islands were the most important.

Concerted efforts through regional cooperation of agencies and concerned individuals in different parts of India can help to maintain a network of heronries. Towards this end, there is a need to develop a more detailed inventory of heronries locally, at district and state level, by concerned individuals and by governmental and non-governmental organisations.

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Conservation of the Sichuan Partridge

A grant of £500 funded a survey of the critically endangered Sichuan Partridge *Arborophila rufipectus* and other birds in the Daliang Shan region of southern Sichuan in China. Following a preliminary survey by Dr Simon Dowell, He Fen-qi and Dai Bo in March 1995, Dai Bo and colleagues from the Sichuan Forestry Department completed a more detailed study of the partridge's distribution, population density and habitat between April and June 1996.

During the 1996 survey, five out of seven areas where Sichuan Partridge was previously known or suspected to occur were visited, and calling birds were recorded at each locality. In addition, a new locality was discovered south of the Xining River in Leibo county, which was found to have both extensive areas of suitable forest (*ca.* 270 km^2) and a high density of calling males. A total of 72 calling males was recorded in these six areas of forest. The overall density in the survey areas was estimated at 0.55 calling males per km^2. If the densities for each locality are multiplied by the estimated area of suitable habitat, a very rough estimate of a total population of 612 calling males results, but it is not known whether a calling male represents a breeding pair.

Sichuan Partridge
Arborophila rufipectus
by Dan Cole

Of the 72 birds recorded, 61 were in primary forest, 9 were in secondary forest and two were in coniferous plantations. More data are needed from the last two habitat types to be able to assess the densities there in relation to those in primary forest. The highest densities of birds were in areas of relatively shallow slope, at altitudes between 1,400 and 1,800 m.

Three of the other restricted-range species characteristic of the South Chinese Forests Endemic Bird Area were recorded during the 1996 survey, all of which are globally threatened. Silver Oriole *Oriolus mellianus* was reasonably widespread in Mabian and Leibo counties and Omeishan Liocichla *Liocichla omeiensis* was locally common in Leibo county, but only one pair of Golden-fronted Fulvetta *Alcippe variegaticeps* was observed, also in Leibo county.

The main threat to the forest habitat of all of these birds is logging and the large-scale replacement of primary broadleaf forest with coniferous plantations. Other threats are encroachment into forest for agriculture, road construction, mining, livestock-herding, bamboo collection and poaching. As a result of the survey, recommendations have been made that four areas are established as nature reserves, that further field work should be carried out to search other potential sites in neighbouring counties, and that a detailed study is made of the biology of the Sichuan Partridge using radio telemetry techniques.

Dai Bo

Current range and status of Green Peafowl in south-east and north-west Yunnan, China

The Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* is widespread in South-East Asia, but it has been declining rapidly in many parts of its range and is globally threatened. Surveys carried out between 1991 and 1993 at the northern edge of its range in central, west and south-west Yunnan province, China, had indicated that the population there had declined considerably to a total of about 800-1,100 individuals. New information indicated that Green Peafowl also survived in the south-east and north-west of the province. The 1994 Forktail-Leica Award funded surveys to assess its status in these parts of Yunnan.

Visits were made to a total of 13 counties in south-east and north-west Yunnan between April 1995 and May 1996. In each county town, visits were made to the county forestry bureau to meet the officers in charge of wildlife management. When they provided information on the occurrence of Green Peafowl around certain towns or villages, the survey team went there to interview local people, particularly local hunters. When information was obtained on the precise sites where peafowls occur, local guides were hired to carry out field surveys.

The Green Peafowl was recorded from six counties in south-east Yunnan prior to 1980, but during the current surveys its presence could only be confirmed at seven sites in three of these counties. One hundred and fifty-four local people were interviewed during the surveys, and, based on the information which they provided, the total Green Peafowl population in south-east Yunnan was estimated at not more than 50 individuals.

In north-west Yunnan, two birds were seen by local people in 1986 by the Zibuluo river, a tributary of the Yangtze, and one was shot there in March of that year. They were at 2,200 m, an unusually high altitude for this species. This is the only record of Green Peafowl in this part of Yunnan.

Detailed information was collected on the vegetation at 28 localities where Green Peafowl were observed or where their footprints were found. Just over half of these records were from coniferous or broadleaf forest, and the remainder from scrub with scattered trees, grassland and farmland. Most of the recording sites were near water at an altitude of 1,300-1,400 m, in areas with a mixture of forest, scrub, grassland and bare ground with a total of less than 20% tree cover. Information was also collected on the peafowl's territory size and behaviour.

The main threat to Green Peafowl in Yunnan is habitat loss, and hunting was a major threat there in the past. Although they were recorded in a variety of habitats during the surveys, they

Green Peafowl Pavo muticus *by Dan Cole*

were never found far from forest. The use of poisonous baits to kill field mice is also a problem, and it is suggested that this practice should be banned. Only a handful of nature reserves in Yunnan support Green Peafowl, and the populations in them are small. There is therefore a need to establish new reserves especially for this species. Farmland is important for foraging, and it is suggested that special crops could be planted along the forest edge in those areas with the largest peafowl populations to provide them with food.

Wen Xianji, Yang Xiaojun, Yang Lan and Shi Wenying

The distribution and ecology of river birds in the Langtang National Park and Likhu Khola catchment, Nepal

River birds as environmental indicators in Nepal

An OBC grant of £500 enabled this study to build on the international work already carried out on how the distribution and behaviour of river birds can indicate quality of the environment and the effects of external influences on river catchments.

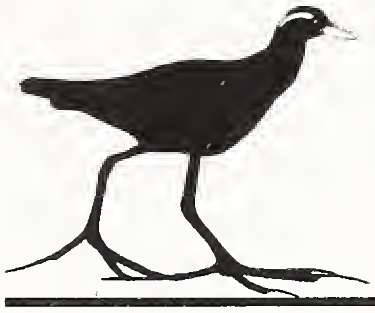
Fairly common species were studied in the Langtang National Park and Likhu Khola catchment where tree clearance, habitat degradation, erosion and pollution are occurring and where a considerable amount is already known of the avifauna. Forktails, chats, wagtails and Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* were surveyed in both spring and autumn at two altitudinal levels, and the behaviour, distribution and diet of these species were looked at with respect to habitat quality and availability of invertebrate food. Bird surveys were carried out at 46 river stretches within the study areas and river habitat surveys took place at ten spot-check points within each stretch. The diet of the most numerous species was studied by the collection and analysis of faecal samples. Rigorous scientific techniques were employed in this study and the report records the training and skills transfer element important for future studies by Nepalese workers, particularly through Bird Conservation Nepal.

The report concludes that the most riparian species at higher altitude, Spotted *Enicurus maculatus* and Little Forktails *E. scouleri* and Brown Dipper will be the best environmental indicators. The distribution of these species showed the closest relationship to the abundance of aquatic invertebrates. Although less commonly recorded at lower altitude, Slaty-backed *E. schistaceus* and Black-backed Forktails *E. immaculatus* are also predominantly riparian, and further work may demonstrate their value as indicators of environmental quality. The study recommends that further work is always carried out in early spring to ensure that the significant variable of seasonal altitudinal distribution is taken into account.

Although an introductory study, this work demonstrates clear value to nature conservation. It gives a strong indication which species may be affected most by changes in physical, biological or chemical characteristics of streams in the Nepal Himalaya. It is important too that the study recognises the value of common species occurring in an important national park to the understanding of how to overcome environmental problems.

Hem Sagar Baral and Sebastian T. Buckton

Little Forktails Ericurus scouleri
by Dan Cole



Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

CAMBODIA

Over-harvesting of waterbird eggs curtailed

A moratorium on harvesting waterbird eggs and chicks in wetlands on the north-west shore of Tonle Sap may have come in the nick of time. The flooded forests which surround this huge lake are one of the most important nesting grounds for storks, pelicans and ibises in South-East Asia and a stronghold for the endangered Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius.* But the bird population in 1996 had slumped to a fraction of its level in the 1970s so workers for the International Crane Foundation and Wetlands International set out on an intensive educational tour of villages in Battambang province. Over-harvesting of eggs and young birds, particularly for feasts to mark the Cambodian New Year, was identified as the cause of the decline.

In addition, wildlife traders have been touring villages offering rewards of $500 for a pair of the critically endangered Giant Ibis *Pseudibis gigantea* and $400 for Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus.*

But local officials heeded the conservation message, backed by posters of endangered species distributed by ICF, and this year did not permit widespread egg-collecting. The early indications are that bird populations have bounced back with Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* numbers up by 20% and total waterbird numbers up by 10%.

CHINA

Streaked Reed Warbler recorded in Gansu province

The globally threatened Streaked Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus sorghophilus* has been recorded in Gansu province in western China, well outside its previously known range. The female specimen was taken in October 1993 in Min Xian in southern Gansu towards the Sichuan border. This species has previously been recorded on migration in northern and eastern China and is an extremely local and uncommon winter visitor to reedbeds and grasslands, often near water, in the Philippines. It is threatened by habitat destruction within its limited wintering range.

Reference

Yang Fatao, Zhang Tao 1997. New bird records from Gansu. *Chinese Journal of Zoology* 32: 48 [in Chinese].

More details of Altai Snowcock in China

Some more details have emerged of the Altai Snowcock *Tetraogallus altaicus*, which was added to the Chinese list in 1991 (*OBC Bull.* 14: 15). The birds were discovered in the Beita mountains on the Mongolian border in the course of a survey conducted in May-June 1990. According to local hunters, they are found on steep, bare, alpine slopes and subalpine steppe, where they are resident. In summer they are found at altitudes of 2,500-3,000 m, while in winter snow they descend to pasture land at about 2,000 m. Two chicks were found on 23rd and 26th June, weighing 300 and 420 g respectively, from which the authors infer that mating and egg-laying takes place in late March/early April and hatching in mid-May. Five flocks were seen, each comprising about 10 birds. The report also gives brief details of habitat/vegetation, breeding behaviour and diet.

Reference

Huang Renxin, Shao Hongguang, Mi Erman 1991. Preliminary observations of the ecology of the Altai Snowcock. *Sichuan Journal of Zoology [Sichuan Dongwu]* 10: 36, [in Chinese].

Wetland conservation in Beidaihe

A gathering of 130 scientists and government officials in Beidaihe brought together all the leading lights in waterbird conservation from North-East Asia. Delegates from China, Japan, Mongolia, Korea, Russia, BirdLife International, the International Crane Foundation, Wetlands International and the Ramsar Convention spent four days at a workshop devoted to wetlands and their birds. One highlight was the launch of the North-East Asian Crane Site Network of 16 reserves linking the breeding and wintering areas of several crane species. Among them is Poyang Lake in China which has 95% of the wintering population of Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*. Also on the list is China's Yancheng Reserve where 60% of the world's Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis* winter. And Japan has nominated the Arasaki wintering ground, which hosts 60% of the world's White-naped Cranes *Grus vipio*. Other agreements struck at the workshop were: to coordinate international conservation initiatives like the Ramsar Strategic Plan for 1997-2002 and the Asia Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 1996-2000; to manage transboundary wetlands; to develop a regional agreement for the conservation of migratory waterbirds. Let's hope they live up to these laudable ideals.

White Eared Pheasant site threatened by copper mine

A remote site in south-west China that is home to some 300 White Eared Pheasants *Crossoptilon crossoptilon* is under threat following the discovery of a copper deposit in the area, the magazine *China Nature* (1997, p.2) reports. The pheasants in Deqin county in the extreme north-west of Yunnan province are extremely tame as they are fed by monks from a nearby monastery. Parts of the area are more than 4,000 m above sea level but this does not mean that it may not be earmarked for development. The article says exploitation of the copper deposit would result in large-scale immigration into the area, and hence in widespread poaching. The White Eared Pheasant has been reported from over 20 sites in western China, with numbers totalling 10,000-50,000 and possibly declining (Pheasants Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan 1995-1999, 1995). Also found in the area are Chestnut-throated Partridge *Tetraophasis obscurus* and Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*, as well as Lesser Panda *Ailurus fulgens*, Black *Selenarctos thibetanus* and Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*, etc.

Beijing customs seize smuggled falcons

The same edition of Chinese Nature as the previous item reports that customs officials at Beijing airport have seized large numbers of falcons that Arabs have been attempting to smuggle out of the country. Between October 1993 and the end of 1996, there were 25 such cases at the airport, involving 305 birds, mainly, possibly all, Sakers *Falco cherrug*, says the magazine, quoting Chinese customs figures. It lists eight such cases in October-November 1996 alone, the biggest involving 60 birds, discovered in five baskets on a plane bound for Sharjah in the UAE. The magazine says the falcons are caught during the spring and autumn migration seasons. After being confiscated the birds are taken to the Beijing Endangered Species Centre with a view to returning them to the wild eventually. There is an extensive illicit trade in falcons in the far west of China and in January 1996, 925 falcon poachers were reported to have been arrested and more than 400 birds were rescued.

Further range extension by the Common Myna

That familiar Asian bird the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* continues to boldly spread where no mynas have gone before. It is now colonising Xinjiang, apparently from the neighbouring Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

The first record, a female, was in May 1986 at Mosouwan in the Junggar Basin. This was considered a vagrant or escape. The following year three birds (a male and two females) were collected at Wuqia, 70 km west of Kashgar. In the past decade the myna has continued its northward progress beyond the Tien Shan mountains and is now found in Ili, Xinyuan, Qapqal and Sayram. The Common Myna originated in India but has been introduced to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Western Samoa, Hawaii and South Africa. In Europe, the myna has been reported breeding in France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Contributed by Ma Ming

HONG KONG

Further threats to Mai Po

The future of Hong Kong's premier wetland sites at Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay now rests with the new Chinese administration. But before the handover on 1st July the Privy Council in the UK approved a 100 hectare golf course and housing estate in an area of fish ponds lying in the outer Buffer Zone 2 (*OBC Bull.* 25: 15). To mitigate the impact the developer has promised to set up a 42 ha nature reserve south of Mai Po and build a sewage treatment plant and screening plant for the polluted waters running into Deep Bay.

INDIA

Plans for a 'megaport' in Maharashtra state

One of Britain's biggest companies has revealed plans to build a £700m 'megaport' on an ecologically sensitive coastal site in Maharashtra state. P & O, the shipping, ports and road transport multinational, has targeted a natural harbour at Vadhavan 80 miles north of Bombay for a 29-berth port capable of handling 250 million tonnes of cargo every year - that's eight times the capacity of Liverpool docks in the UK. It wants to build a passenger terminal and berths for delivering oil, coal and cement.

Maharashtra state officials, not surprisingly, are very enthusiastic about the project despite the land zoned for the port being currently occupied by the Dahanu Warli people whose flower farms and fruit orchards supply Bombay with 8,500 railway wagons of fresh produce every month.

Dahanu is the last extensive area of countryside in the region and as such was designated an 'ecologically fragile' area by the Indian Environment Ministry in 1991 following plans for a power station in the area. Indeed, the Warli village of Bordi was identified as India's first 'ecotourist destination' at the same time.

P & O is preparing a feasibility report for the proposed port which has to be approved by the Environment Ministry. The company is stressing its commitment to protection of the environment and says it will work with local government officials to minimise the impact of the megaport.

Further habitat destruction in Rajasthan national parks

Disturbing reports from two of India's premier national parks. An OBC member birding in Desert National Park and at Ranthambhor saw flagrant examples of habitat degradation by local people grazing their animals and cutting firewood in core parts of the reserves.

At the Desert National Park, which harbours a significant population of the endangered Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps*, peasant farmers were grazing their stock in the bustard enclosure within sight of the park buildings. The park wardens seemed unconcerned.

At Ranthambhor, renowned for its accessible tiger *Panthera tigris* population, the story was the same. Here, local villagers were removing substantial quantities of firewood and foliage from the sal forest and even when challenged by guides were unperturbed.

It is often suggested that setting up cottage industries as an alternative source of income could reduce the impact local woodcutters have on national parks. But at Ranthambhor, village women decline the offer of craftwork because they can earn the same money more easily by collecting firewood and selling it at market.

Better news on the Ranthambhor tigers following widespread poaching a few years ago: our correspondent saw them on four out of five jeep safaris during his visit earlier this year.

Destruction of Bristled Grassbird site near Delhi

To my shock and horror I found that the entire area around Okhla which had previously held the Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striatus* (*OBC Bull.* 24: 43) had been bulldozed and all the grassland completely destroyed. It seems this land was near to the Prime Minister's private residence in Maharani Bagh and this was a move to rid the area of mosquitoes.

There is no chance that the birds will return this year, but if the destruction is stopped, the area should return to normal after the monsoons, unless the neighbouring farmers encroach on the land.

Contributed by Bikram Grewal

Captive-bred Siberian Crane dies

One of the four captive-bred Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* released in the Keoladeo National Park near Bharatpur last year has died. The carcass of the bird was found by park authorities. It has been sent to the Agriculture

University at Hissar in Haryana for a post-mortem to ascertain the cause of death, as no external injury was found on its body. The four captive-bred migratory Siberian Cranes were released in the park in February last year with the hope that they would mingle with the wild birds wintering in the park and fly back to their nesting grounds with them. But the experiment did not succeed since the flock of wild birds left for its journey back home without the four captive-bred birds. The captive-bred Siberian Cranes were brought to the park by the International Crane Foundation of the United States. The forest department sources said that the bird found dead had been feeding normally and showed no sign of any illness. So far 10 captive-bred birds have been released in the park; several have died and others have disappeared, leaving only three birds in the park now.

INDONESIA

Dramatic falls in Red-and-Blue Lory population

The Action Sampiri Conservation Project reports that the population of the Red-and-blue Lory *Eos histrio* in Sangihe and Talaud has fallen dramatically in the brief period between expeditions to the islands in 1995 and 1997. Some roost sites used by the Lory, whose local name is Sampiri, have seen a 75% decline in numbers of this attractive bird. It seems the illegal cagebird trade is the main reason. The British-Indonesian research team failed to find the race *histrio* on Sangihe and consider this island form may be virtually extinct. The race *talautensis* is confined to the largest island of Karakelang in the Talaud group and Action Sampiri fears it will go the same way as *histrio*. The team took a bird trapper along with them as they visited villagers on Talaud and found local people very receptive to the conservation message. Villagers were surprised to learn that the lory is only found on their islands and that it is not found wild in the UK. A follow-up visit to reinforce the need to conserve the lory is planned for 1998.

LAOS

Nam Theun 2 Dam threat to wildlife

The environmental impact assessment of the proposed $1.5 billion Nam Theun 2 Dam admits that it will have a significant impact on Laos's eight remaining pairs of the endangered White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*.

The $5.5 million study into the dam – which will flood 450 km^2 of land on the Nakai plateau – also concluded that it would seriously affect up to 150 wild Asian elephants *Elephus maximus*.

The elephants migrate across the Nam Theun river in the dry season in search of food but they won't be able to cross the vast lake created by the proposed dam. This has prompted the dam's backers to suggest the elephants be taught to walk across the dam wall! Food would be placed along the dam to persuade the elephants to cross from one side to the other.

White-winged Duck
Cairina scutulata
by Hil Bruinsma

The NT2 Electricity Consortium environment manager, Peter Goldston, conceded that the White-winged Duck will suffer similar disruption but felt the impact would be mitigated.

'We believe that the project's reservoir will not affect them as they can move to live in the forest area surrounding the reservoir' he claimed.

Mr Goldston also said that 50% of the trees in the catchment area had already been logged out by the company awarded the franchise. This is even before the Lao cabinet's final approval for the project or the World Bank agrees to a $100m loan guarantee...

The NT2 dam would generate 900 MW of hydroelectricity which is just a fraction of the power Laos has promised to supply to neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam in the next decade.

The contract with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand is for 3,000 MW by 2006.

And Vietnam is expecting delivery of a further 1,500-2,000 MW over the same period. Even if the lower total of 4,500 MW is taken, that's the output of *five* dams the size of Nam Theun 2.

Hydropower is one of the Lao government's top priorities: it has 18 schemes planned.

NEPAL

Nepal to invite Enron for power talks

Nepal will invite US power giant Enron Corp for talks on a proposal to build a multibillion dollar hydropower plant in the Himalayan kingdom, officials said. They said a formal letter of invitation would be sent to the Houston-based company, whose Enron Renewable Energy Corp unit has proposed building a dam on the Karnali river in west Nepal.

The project would produce hydroelectric power for export to neighbouring India and China.

Officials said the Karnali river in western Nepal could generate up to 10,800 MW of hydroelectric power and produce billions of dollars of foreign investment. Nepali officials said in January that Enron also wanted to develop the $1 billion, 201 MW Arun III project in east Nepal. The Kathmandu Post newspaper said that the government had yet to take a decision on the project.

The World Bank abandoned plans in 1995 to lend $175 million for the Arun III project, saying Nepal needed to focus on smaller, less ambitious power projects on its many rivers. Late last month, the government agreed to plans by Australia's Snowy Mountain Engineering Corp to build a $1 billion, 750 MW dam in western Nepal.

NORTH KOREA

North Korea to boost nature reserves

North Korea plans to increase the number and size of its nature reserves, with a special emphasis on protecting wetlands to assure the future of Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis* and other wetland birds, according to Professor Jong-ryol Chong of the Korea University in Tokyo. For many years the cranes have been known to over-winter in the Choelwon Basin in the Demilitarized Zone and along the tidal mudflats of the south-west coast of North Korea. The North Korean government is now 'examining the possibility of strengthening the protection of these critical wetlands' and is also considering specific management and protection plans for the Mundok and Kumya Wetland Reserves further north on the west and east coasts respectively, Professor Chong reports. Hooded *G. monacha*, White-naped *G. vipio*, Red-crowned and Eurasian *G. grus* Cranes all rest on migration at the 3,000 ha Mundok Reserve, and the 2,000 ha of wetland near Sanjon bay at Kumya provide habitat in spring and autumn for White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes.

PHILIPPINES

Some changes affecting visitors to the Philippines

During a trip to the Philippines I noted several changes that could directly affect the plans of future visitors to the country. The most important of these is the abandonment of the village of Sitio Siete in South Cotabato, Mindanao. At the time of our visit (late December '96) there were still several houses with good roofs, but future visitors should either take camping gear with them, or ask permission from the head villager to stay in one of the other nearby villages. They would also be well advised to check on the current safety of the area with the local police at Lake Sebu.

The arrangements for visiting PICOP (Paper Industry Corporation of the Philippines), Bislig, Mindanao, have changed. The company has recently been bought out by a Malaysian logging operative and the new management is denying access to birders wanting to enter the logging concession, an important area of lowland rainforest in eastern Mindanao. It may be possible, however, to find a way to access this important area of forest.

Hamut Camp, currently the best known site for Whiskered Pitta *Pitta kochi* in the northern part of the Sierra Madre range in Isabela Province, Luzon, looks set to be damaged by the collection of rattan. At the time of our visit (February 97) a road was being pushed through to the camp according to locals. It had come to a temporary halt at a large fallen tree, but seems set to continue along the route of an old logging track. The camp itself is now a permanent settlement for a group of rattan collectors and a new shelter has been built on the flat area that was previously used as a camp site. The forest understorey is being opened up considerably in the vicinity of the camp with worrying consequences for Whiskered Pitta and other sensitive species. However, most disturbingly we passed a group of 17 men with one chain-saw on their way into Hamut Camp as we were leaving.

The phone number for Perla Magsalay on Cebu given in *OBC Bull.* 21 is out of date. Perla can still be contacted by post at Cebu Zoo, but the phone number is now 255 0849. Alternatively Perla's pager number is 544-00 and then unit no. 826-1413.

Contributed by Brian Gee

THAILAND

Further decline for Gurney's Pitta

The rollercoaster ride taken by the world's only known population of Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* has taken another downward plunge. Following their rediscovery of the pitta in lowland forest at Khao Nor Chuchi in 1986 census work by Phil Round and Uthai Treesucon (aided by the OBC'S first-ever Conservation Fund award) logged 38 pairs in 1987.

It was 21 pairs in 1992; this year the population has declined to 10 pairs. And the latest threats to its forest home in Krabi province present the serious prospect of extinction for this beautiful bird.

Two roads are being cut through the 30 km^2 of forest protecting the dwindling pitta population. And people from surrounding villages are taking over forest land for cultivation.

Sadly, the Thai Forestry Department has been slow to merge the lowland forest of Khao Nor Chuchi with the neighbouring wildlife sanctuary of Khao Pra Bang Kram which was declared to protect Gurney's Pitta.

Habitat destruction at Khao Sam Roi Yat

A property company has started work on a beachfront resort at Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park - a pristine coastal strip which is the nesting ground for Malaysian Plover *Charadrius peronii* and Little Tern *Sterna albifrons.* Both of these species are endangered in Thailand and KSRY is one of their few remaining strongholds. The beach at KSRY is one of the few unspoilt stretches along the east coast of Thailand and its designation as the country's second national park should have granted it protection.

But it now appears that the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) failed to include the coastal strip within the park boundaries and a private company called the Diamond Group says it has legal land tenure for its Natura Beach holiday bungalow complex.

Khao Sam Roi Yot in Prachuap Khiri Khan province is presently an undisturbed spread of marshland and ponds which stretches from the inland limestone massif to the sandy beach south of the village of Khao Daeng.

For low-income Thais it is one of the few undeveloped stretches of coast they are free to enjoy but Natura Beach would change that. The Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) is lobbying hard to prevent the development going ahead and the Thai Agriculture Minister has ordered the RFD to step in. The boundaries of the national park appear unclear, even moveable, but the RFD has conceded that a quarter of the proposed resort project located within the park boundary.

And the provincial authority has found that the rest of the land claimed by the Diamond Group is illegally occupied because, as a tidal floodplain, it is public land and private ownership is legally impossible.

The BCST is urging anyone concerned about the proposals at Khao Sam Roi Yot to write to the Thai Prime Minister, the Director General of the Royal Forestry Department and the Secretary General of the Thai Tourism Authority pointing out how much they value KSRY.

Threats to Doi Inthanon National Park

Thirsty tourists visiting Doi Inthanon National Park in the north of Thailand are having a marked impact on the unique rhododendron swamp at the summit. Park authorities seem to feel obliged to provide water for visitors at the tourist information centre and they're pumping that water straight out of the swamp the visitors have come to see, drying it out.

Birders will be familiar with the nature trail through the moss-clad rhododendrons as the best vantage point to see birds like White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana* and Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus* but Thai tourists come in their droves to the 'Roof of Thailand' to see the red rhododendron flowering between November and March.

A million people visit Doi Inthanon each year and if they all want a drink of water, the summit swamp won't be a swamp much longer.

Deforestation continues at an alarming rate

The woeful state of Thailand's forests is not improving. Despite government policy which dictates that 40% of the country should be under forest cover (52 million hectares), the latest figure from the Royal Forestry Department shows only 25% of land is forested. The last year in which Thailand hit its self-imposed forestry target was 1975. The principal culprits for deforestation are loggers illegally removing prime timber whilst local officials look the other way, hill tribes whose shifting cultivation is gradually denuding all the forest cover on the country's mountains, and villagers who chop down trees for fuel and animal fodder. Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh is reported to have ordered the RFD to stop 'harassing' villagers who are clearing trees from national forests. Addressing a rally of supporters in the north-eastern city of Nakhon Ratchasima, the PM is reported to have said: 'No more arrests. The people can now live where they are without worries.' His green light to farmers encroaching on national forests and national parks is seen as a reward to poor people who backed his New Aspiration Party in last year's general election. It could trigger a land rush from which Thailand's forests will never recover. That 40% tree cover target looks increasingly improbable.

King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit have both implored their subjects to conserve Thailand's forests. And for its part, the RFD is in the midst of a reafforestation campaign designed to replant 810,000 ha of degraded forest reserves with quick-growing trees like eucalyptus – and plant a further 972,000 ha with hardwoods like teak. But there's little enthusiasm for the task outside the RFD and it seems doomed to failure.

VIETNAM

Record numbers of Spoon-billed Sandpipers

Vietnam's highest-ever count of Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmeus* was recorded at a high-tide wader roost in March. BirdLife Vietnam staff logged 27 of these endangered waders at the Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve. Meanwhile, an important staging and wintering area for shorebirds such as Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other threatened species like Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* has been blighted by shrimp-pond development. Several hundred hectares of the intertidal mudflats at Cam Ranh Bay have been taken over for shrimp farming. And many of the pond bunds have been built using coral...

Captive breeding of Vietnames Pheasants

From the UK comes further news of the critically endangered Vietnamese Pheasant *Lophura hatinhensis.* The World Pheasant Association has announced the first captive breeding of the Vietnamese Pheasant outside of Vietnam. Breeding pairs were sent on loan to the WPA from Hanoi Zoo. The pheasant was only discovered in 1965 and was first bred in captivity, at Hanoi Zoo, in 1993. Its close relatives Edwards's Pheasant *L. edwardsi* and Imperial Pheasant *L. imperialis* were first taken into captivity by Jean Delacour in 1924. There are now 1,500 or more Edwards's Pheasant in captivity, which was only rediscovered in the wild in 1995 (*OBC Bull.* 25: 20).

Sources: Action Sampiri Conservation Project, Bikram Grewal, *Bird Conservation of Thailand Bulletin*, Brian Gee, *China Nature, ICF Bugle,* Michael Rank, Mike Watson, Natural History of South Asia - General discussion and research email news group, *Phnom Penh Post, The Cambodia Daily, The Nation, The Observer, The Independent, Reuters, The Tattler, Times of India,* World Pheasant Association, Sangihe & Talaud Conservation Project.

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The collection of nests of the Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* for the bird-nest trade in Sri Lanka

There are five species of swifts (Apodidae) resident in Sri Lanka, but only the Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* constructs nests that are commercially exploited. Since 1993 there has been a resumption in the illegal trade in these nests which is having a detrimental effect on the populations of this species in Sri Lanka.

Although most swifts use saliva to bind leaves, moss or feathers to form their nests, those species whose nests are exploited consist mainly of hardened saliva, known as nest cement. This nest cement is secreted by the pair of sublingual salivary glands which enlarge at nest-building time to provide the necessary cement and which gradually regress to normal thereafter.[1] These swifts usually nest in dark caves and they are able to orientate in darkness by echo-location.[1]

The nests of swiftlets have been believed to have aphrodisiac and medicinal properties and have been eaten for recuperative purposes after consumptive diseases such as tuberculosis, or for treating debility. They are said to reinforce body fluids, nourish blood and moisten the respiratory tract and skin, replenish the vital energy of life, build up health and aid metabolism, digestion, absorption of nutrients and prolong life.[2] There is, however, little scientific research on these claims and the medicinal value of the nests is still in question.[2]

The nests of the Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* contain a certain quantity of foreign matter (feather, moss, twigs) and require processing before consumption and are of a lesser value, known as 'black-nests' in the trade.[2] The trade in the nests of this species once occurred in India in the latter part of the 19th century and the British colonial authorities annually auctioned contracts to export nests to China. However this trade faded out by the early 20th century 'perhaps as a result of over- exploitation of the colonies and the disproportionate risks and organisation involved in the collection of nests'.[1] The collection and trade in nests in Sri Lanka is mentioned by Spittel[3] who gives a vivid description of how the nests are collected by the native forest dwellers (locally known as Veddas). This collecting was confined to the Eastern Province where the Veddas live but had completely died down by the middle of the century. The Veddas used to live in caves, the dark interiors of some of which are still inhabited by colonies of *C. unicolor*. The collection of nests was only carried out once all the young had fledged.

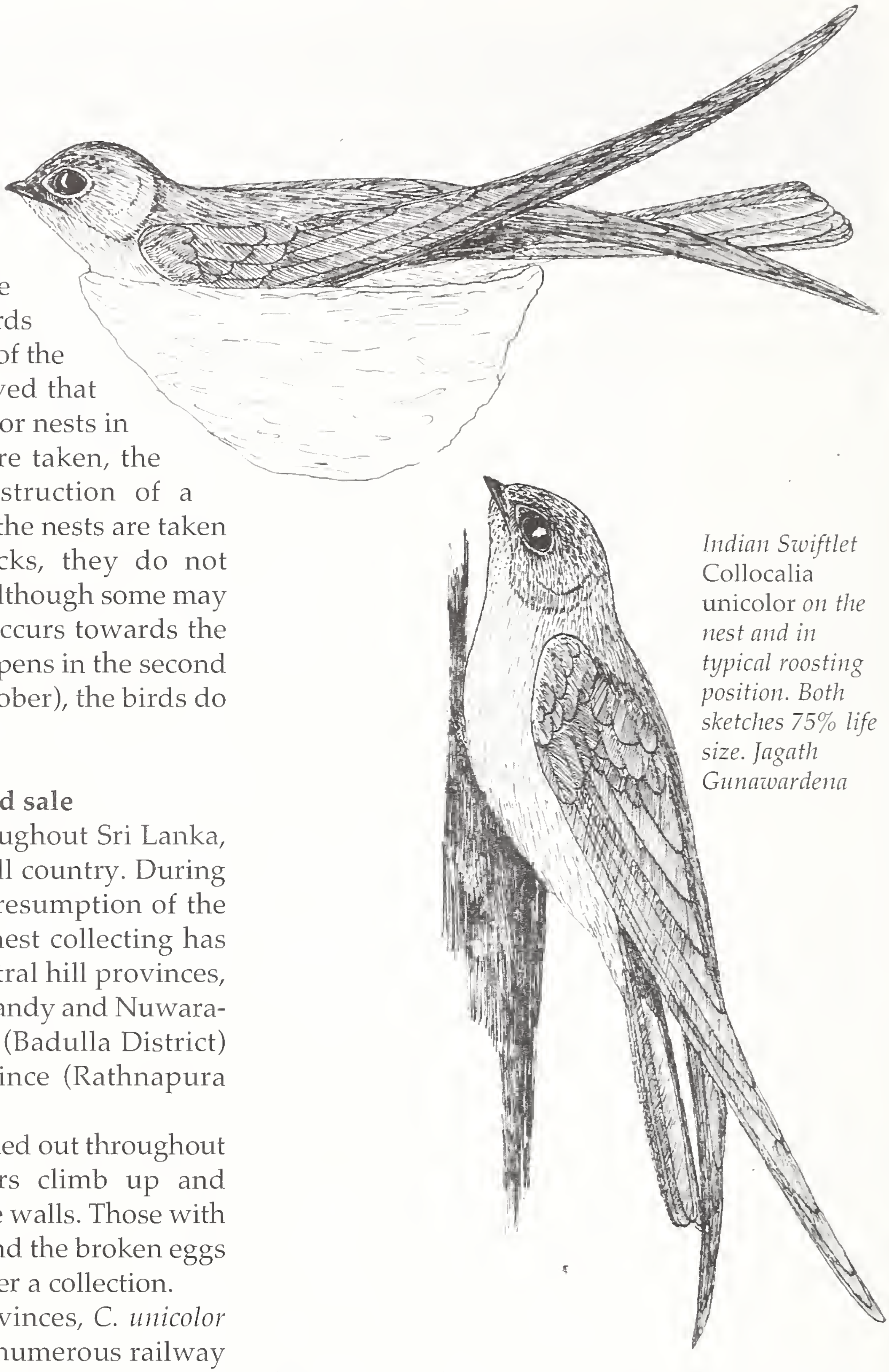
This swiftlet has been protected by law in Sri Lanka since 1964 and therefore the destruction of the birds, eggs or nest is a punishable offence. The penalties were increased in August 1993 by an amendment, ironically, just before the illegal birds-nest trade resumed. The trade is carried on in secret and the exact numbers and quantities involved are hard to obtain. Most of the facts presented here are thus based on personal observations and those provided by informants as well as from records from seized consignments.

Nesting and nests

The nesting period of *C. unicolor* in Sri Lanka is said to be difficult to determine accurately because the birds frequent the same caves for roosting and nesting, but the main season seems to be in the first half of the year with a second brood in August-September.[4] Others have given the period of nesting as from December to April,[5] December to June[6] and March to September.[1,7] The nest building usually starts in late December-early January and extends to June and again to a lesser degree from August to October (pers. obs.). During breeding the birds can be seen entering and leaving their roosting caves throughout the day, whereas at other times they leave in the early morning and return at dusk.

The nest is a shallow cup attached to the cave wall. The base is thick and is comprised entirely of saliva. The nest is 6.5 - 8 cm across and 2-2.5 cm deep. A nest weighs 6-8 grams. The amount of foreign matter (mass, feathers, twigs) varies, and some are entirely made of saliva. The nest is always built on a rough, dry, dark, vertical surface. Two elliptical white eggs are laid.

When brooding, part of the bird protrudes, since it is (at 12.5 cm) longer than the nest. The chicks, when half grown, crawl out of the nest and stay clinging to the cave wall, facing upwards, which is the same stance adopted by the adults when roosting. If the nests are not removed, some birds tend a second brood at the end of the season. It has also been observed that when partly constructed nests or nests in which the eggs are not laid are taken, the birds immediately start construction of a replacement nest. However, if the nests are taken when there are eggs or chicks, they do not normally resort to rebuilding, although some may make another attempt if this occurs towards the end of the first season. If it happens in the second part of the season (August-October), the birds do not attempt to rebuild.



Indian Swiftlet Collocalia unicolor *on the nest and in typical roosting position. Both sketches 75% life size. Jagath Gunawardena*

Nest collection, processing and sale

The species is distributed throughout Sri Lanka, but is more abundant in the hill country. During the past four years, since the resumption of the birds-nest trade in late 1993, nest collecting has been observed in the three central hill provinces, namely the Central Province (Kandy and Nuwara-Eliya Districts), Uva Province (Badulla District) and the Sabaragamuwa Province (Rathnapura District).

The collection of nests is carried out throughout the season, and the collectors climb up and carefully scrape the nests off the walls. Those with eggs or young are not spared and the broken eggs and bodies litter the ground after a collection.

In the Central and Uva Provinces, *C. unicolor* has successfully exploited the numerous railway tunnels for nesting. These colonies have been severely exploited by collectors, the main reason being the easy accessibility. However the nests in railway tunnels turn grey or black from the soot in the exhaust smoke of the trains, bringing their quality and the profit for the collectors down. Collectors therefore always strive to gather nests early in the breeding season as the relatively fresh, cleaner nests are lighter in colour and therefore fetch a higher price. The crescent-shaped bases, which are constructed entirely of saliva, are first separated as they fetch a higher price, then the nests are processed in one of two ways.

(*a*) Soaking (sometimes with a little washing powder) and removing the foreign matter and then drying the pieces. These nests are white to yellowish-white and show the fibrous structure clearly.

(*b*) Soaking, removing the foreign matter and pressing the pieces before drying. These nests then look like pieces of translucent plastic and the fibrous nature is not very clear.

The unprocessed nests are brought from collectors at prices ranging from Rs10,000-30,000 per kilogram, depending on quality. The nests are brought to Colombo and Rathnapura. The consignments seized by the Sri Lanka customs were destined for Singapore and the Far East.

Legal protection

The species has been protected under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance No.2 since 1964 and the punishments were further increased by an amendment in 1993. The capturing, killing or wounding of a bird, the destruction of the nest or eggs, the selling, offering to sell a part of the bird or even keeping any of these is liable to a fine of Rs5,000-10,000 or imprisonment of 2 to 5 years or both. The export of any part of the bird is strictly regulated. The punishment for an infringement of this law is a fine of Rs20,000-50,000 or an imprisonment of 5 to 10 years or both.

However, none of the 'edible-nest swiftlets' (*Collocalia* sp.) derive any protection from international trade laws, nor from the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). At the 9th Conference of Parties in November 1994, Italy proposed to put all the species on CITES Appendix II, but this was withdrawn after lengthy backroom discussions.[8]

Since the resumption of the illicit trade, the police have apprehended a number of culprits and brought them before the courts where several have been punished. The Customs Department has also been successful in seizing several consignments at Katunayaka International Airport. The last seizure, in 1995, was a record haul of 44 kilograms of processed nests. According to Sri Lanka customs, the price of a kilogram of processed nests is about US$2,500-3,000. The street value of a kilogram in Hong Kong is around US$2,620-4,060.[2] The record consignment of birds nests seized in 1995 drew a fine of Rs14.5 million, a record fine imposed for the illegal export of animal parts.

Since law enforcement efforts have increased, the trade is carried out more discreetly. However, given the sums of money involved, it is not surprising that it is difficult to eradicate the trade.

Impact on the species

Firstly, there has been no assessment of the nesting colonies of *C. unicolor* in Sri Lanka and therefore it is difficult to estimate the reduction in breeding numbers. Secondly, it is perhaps still too early to see a significant reduction since the illicit trade has only been going on for the past four years. However, disturbing trends can be seen as the collecting has significantly increased during the last two years. In all the caves surveyed, the birds have failed to raise a single brood since 1995. This population depletion will become increasingly significant as the present adults begin to thin out.

In several caves in the Uva Province where collection pressure has been severe, there was no evidence of breeding during the August-October 1996 season, nor during the first half of 1997. Observers report that birds no longer come to roost in these caves , which they seem to have abandoned.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all the informants, who have to remain anonymous, without whose dedication, many of these details would not have emerged. Thanks also to Mr Samantha Gunasekara, Director of Customs, for both his dedication to curb the illegal wildlife trade and for providing me with information on the seized consignments.

I gratefully appreciate the good work carried out by the officers of the Police, the Customs Department and the Department of Wildlife Conservation in trying to stop the illegal collection of nests. Finally, thanks to Miss G.T. Sevvandi for her efficient secretarial assistance.

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Bird study in Sri Lanka; an historical perspective

Renowned ornithologist Priyantha Wijesinghe, author of the influential *Checklist of the birds of Sri Lanka* (Ceylon Bird Club, 1994), here gives an overview of the development of bird study in Sri Lanka. The bird names used follow his checklist with the alternative versions from *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* by Inskipp *et al.* given in brackets.

The first person to make a special study of the birds of Sri Lanka seems to have been Joan Gideon Loten (1710-1789), a governor of Sri Lanka from 1752-1757. At the time the island's maritime regions were held by the Dutch. Loten collected specimens of birds and other animals, noted their weights, dimensions and Sinhalese names and had them illustrated by a young European-Sinhalese artist named Pieter Cornelis de Bevere. After returning to Europe in 1758 Loten corresponded with several naturalists to whom he loaned his drawings and specimens for illustration and description in publications. Two such works were *Gleanings of Natural History* (1758-1764) by George Edwards and its sequel *New Illustrations of Zoology* (1776) by Peter Brown. Neither Edwards nor Brown used Latin binomial names; these were supplied later by Carl Linnaeus in the 12th (1766) and by Johann Friedrich Gmelin in the 13th (1788-1789) editions of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae.* Sri Lankan birds named by Linnaeus from Edwards's illustrations or Loten's specimens included the Indian Roller (race *indica*), Indian Pitta, Little (Small) Minivet, Purple-rumped Sunbird and Loten's Sunbird. Species named by Gmelin included the Shikra, Pompadour Green Pigeon, Emerald (Asian Emerald) Cuckoo, Brown Fish Owl, Ceylon Small (Crimson-fronted) Barbet, Black-capped (Black-crested) Bulbul and Red-vented Bulbul (race *haemorrhous*). Also based on Loten's drawings, Thomas Pennant's *Indian Zoology* (1769) contained the names and description of the Indian Darter (Darter), Painted Stork, Comb Duck, Pied Harrier, White-breasted Waterhen, Red-faced Malkoha, Collared Scops Owl, Ceylon (Malabar) Trogon and Common Tailorbird. A later edition of this work, by Johann Reinhold Forster (1729-1798), was published as *Indische Zoologie* (or *Zoologia Indica*) (1781) and had the names and descriptions of three more species: Spot-billed Duck, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Spurfowl and Orange (Scarlet) Minivet.

By the beginning of the 19th century the British had replaced the Dutch as the colonial power in Sri Lanka. A number of civil servants, army officers and doctors stationed in the island were keen naturalists. One such was Robert Templeton (1802-1892), an Irish medical officer with the Royal Artillery who was stationed in Sri Lanka between 1839-1848. Another was Edgar Leopold Layard (1824-1900) who served in the Ceylon Civil Service between 1846-1853. Edward Fredric Kelaart (1818-1860) was a Sri Lankan doctor of Dutch origin who was active mainly during 1849-1855. These three men corresponded with and sent specimens to Edward Blyth (1810-1873), Curator of the Museum of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta, who described and named most of the species discovered by them between 1846-1852 in the Society's Journal. Templeton was able to record 183 species of birds from Sri Lanka and discovered the following: Chestnut-backed Owlet, Spotted-winged (Spot-winged) Thrush, Indian Scimitar Babbler (race *melanurus*), Ceylon Rufous (Orange-billed) Babbler, White-vented (White-bellied) Drongo (race *leucopygialis*) and Ceylon Hill-Mynah (Sri Lanka Myna). Layard continued the study of Sri Lanka's birds after Templeton left the island. Among the species discovered by him were Layard's Parakeet, Green-billed Coucal, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Frogmouth, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (race *gymnopthalmos*), Crimson-backed Woodpecker (Greater Flameback) (race *stricklandi*), Ceylon (Red-rumped) Swallow (race *hyperythra*), Scaly Thrush (race *imbricata*), Layard's (Brown-breasted) Flycatcher, Brown-capped Babbler and Black-fronted (Dark-fronted) Babbler (race *nigrifrons*). Kelaart, who was based at Nuwara

Eliya, was the discoverer of the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Wood Pigeon, Highland (Grey) Nightjar (race *kelaarti*), Yellow-eared Bulbul, Pied Bushchat (race *atrata*), (Eurasian) Blackbird (race *kinnissii*), Ceylon (Sri Lanka Bush) Warbler, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush and Ceylon Hill (Black-throated) Munia. He was also aware of a second species of white-eye in the hills many years before it was formally described as a new species. The most important publication on Sri Lankan birds during this period was Layard's *Notes on the ornithology of Ceylon...* which appeared in 1853-1854 in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History*. It listed 315 species, which represented about 300 valid species after adjusting for errors, and contained much information on the habits and distribution of many species and included also their Sinhalese and Tamil names. Specimens sent by Templeton, Layard and Kelaart to Blyth (including the types of new species) passed with the collections of the Asiatic Society of Bengal to the Indian Museum (now Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta), while the bulk of Layard's private collection was deposited at the Poole Museum (now Borough of Poole Museum Service), in Poole, Dorset.

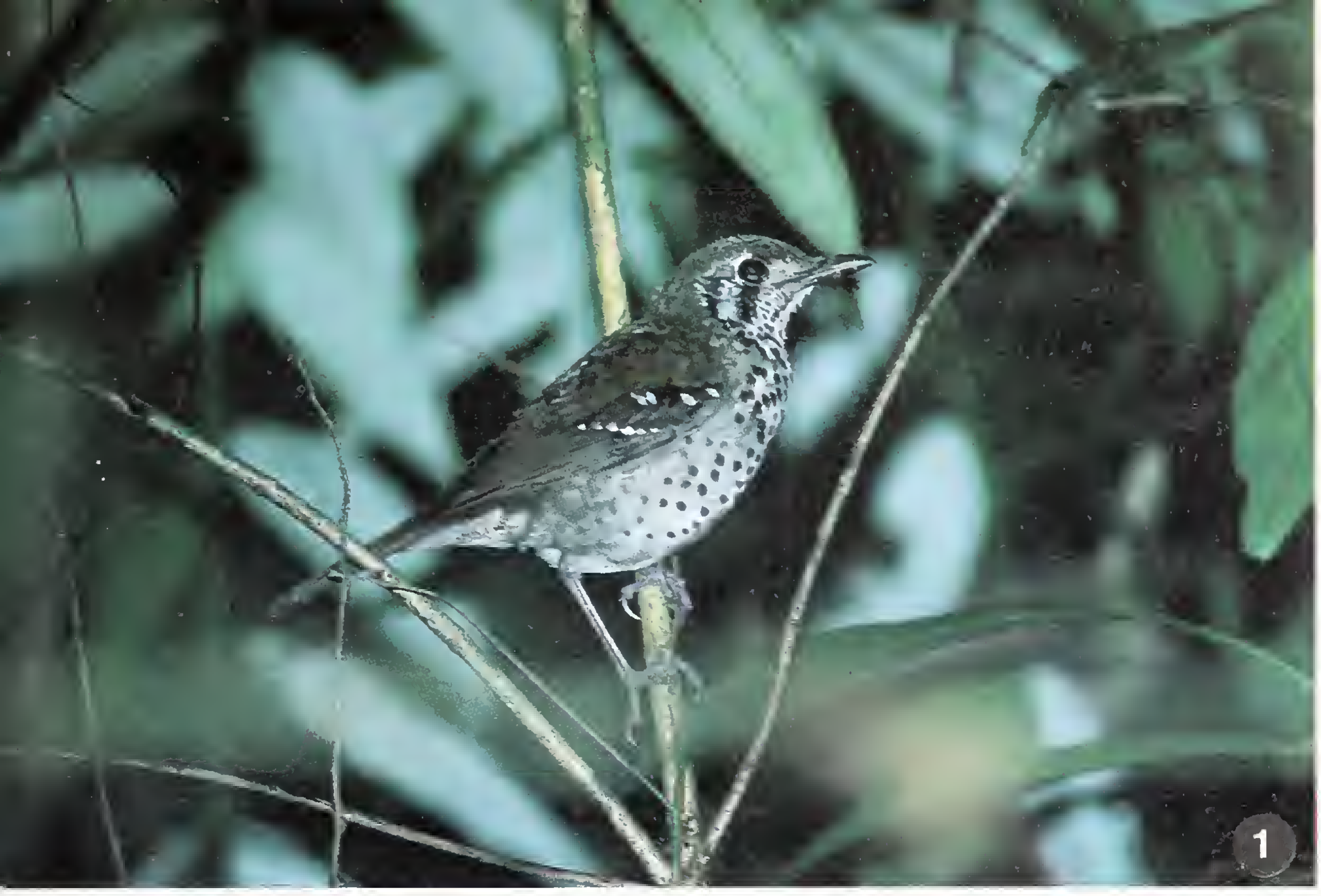
The studies of Blyth, Thomas Caverhill Jerdon (1811-1875), Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800-1894) and others in India and Nepal culminated in the publication of Jerdon's *The Birds of India* (1862-1864) and though Sri Lanka was outside the scope of this work it was useful to naturalists interested in Sri Lanka's birds. Among these the two most important figures in the second half of the 19th century were Edmund William Hunt Holdsworth (1829-1915) and William Vincent Legge (1841-1918). Holdsworth was a marine biologist who was in Sri Lanka between 1865-1871. Based on the collection of birds he made in the island and the private collection of the 9th Marquis of Tweeddale (Arthur Hay, Lord Walden) (1824-1878) Holdsworth published in 1872 an important paper in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*. It contained a general discussion of Sri Lanka's birdlife and dealt with some 323 species. Notable among the new additions were the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Whistling Thrush and Ceylon Hill (Sri Lanka) White-eye. Legge was an officer in the Royal Artillery who was stationed in Sri Lanka between 1868-1877. During this period he collected birds extensively and published a number of papers in several local and overseas journals in which he reported new additions and discussed the distribution and habits of birds in Sri Lanka. Legge's Flowerpecker was named and described by Philip Lutley Sclater (1829-1913) in 1872 from specimens obtained by Legge, although the species had been collected many years before. In England Legge made a detailed study of the specimens he had gathered in Sri Lanka, comparing them with specimens in the British Museum and other collections, and in a relatively short time wrote and published his monumental *A History of the Birds of Ceylon* (1878-1880, 3 parts). Illustrated with 34 colour plates, mostly by John Gerrard Keulemans (1842-1912), it dealt with some 371 species and was considered one of the most complete and successful monographs of a limited avifauna. Legge paid special attention to taxonomy and nomenclature, plumage, variation, and distribution, and provided good notes on the birds' habits. Half a century later, in 1936, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery gave Legge's Sri Lankan collection, consisting of 678 skins representing 278 species and a small collection of eggs, to the Colombo Museum subject to the condition that it would be properly housed and maintained as a research collection.

The Colombo Museum (Department of National Museums, Sri Lanka) was established in 1877. The Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, which had served as a forum for naturalists like Layard and Legge, was instrumental in its establishment and the Museum's collections were built around the Society's collections. In 1877 the bird collection amounted to some 1,036 skins. Though no specialist on birds was ever employed by the Museum, thanks to the interest and dedication of its early directors, such as Amyrald Haly, Arthur Willey and Joseph Pearson (all of whom were zoologists), the Museum's bird collection continued to grow. By 1914 the only books to have appeared on the birds of Sri Lanka since the publication of Legge's work were James A. Murray's *The Avifauna of the Island of Ceylon* (1890), a derivative work of little merit, and the volumes on Birds (1889-1898, 4 volumes) by Eugene William Oates (1845-1911) and William Thomas Blanford (1832-1905) in the newly launched series *The Fauna of British India, including Ceylon and Burma*. In 1914 Joseph Pearson organised a committee consisting of Walter Ernest Wait (1878-1957), Frederick Lewis and Walter Ashby Cave, with Pearson himself as editor, to 'compile an illustrated handbook of Ceylon birds, which will be specially written for beginners.' Lewis and

Cave were unable to participate fully in the project and the responsibility for writing the book fell on Wait, who had been assisting with the Museum's bird collection unofficially for several years. Wait published his work in instalments in the Museum's journal *Spolia Zeylanica* between 1916-1922, and the work finally appeared as a book in 1925 under the title *Manual of the Birds of Ceylon*. During the preparation of this work Wait came in contact with Edward Charles Stuart Baker (1864-1944), who had earned a reputation as an authority on Indian birds while serving in the Indian Police in Assam and who was engaged in revising the bird volumes in the *Fauna of British India* series. Baker was much influenced by Ernst Hartert (1859-1933), Lionel Walter Rothschild's curator of birds at the Tring Museum, a prominent proponent of the subspecies category and trinomial nomenclature. Baker introduced these novelties to Indian ornithology in a list he drew up in 1920-1923 in preparation for his *Fauna* revision and this list was followed by Wait. Baker's work was published in 1922-1930 and in 1931 Wait brought out a second edition of his book. It dealt with some 372 forms and was for many years the standard reference on Sri Lanka's birds. To replace the inadequate illustrations in Wait's *Manual* the Ceylon Government issued *Coloured Plates of the Birds of Ceylon* (1927-1935, 4 parts), based on a series of paintings by George Morrison Henry (1891-1983). Henry was at the time Assistant in Systematic Entomology at the Colombo Museum (1913-1946) and the paintings were commissioned by the American zoological bibliographer Casey Albert Wood (1856-1942).

William Watt Addison Phillips (1892-1981) came to Sri Lanka in 1911 to take up a career in planting. While serving in the 1914-1918 war with the Indian Army he was taken prisoner at Kut el Amara and developed an interest in natural history while a prisoner of war in Turkey. On his return to Sri Lanka in 1919 he found time from his planting profession to devote to the study of Sri Lanka's mammals and birds. Work by Claud Buchanan Ticehurst (1881-1941), Hugh Whistler (1889-1943) and others in India had revealed many deficiencies in Baker's work and in order to remedy these, through the interest of the Bombay Natural History Society and individuals like Whistler, Ticehurst, Norman Boyd Kinnear (1882-1957) and Salim Ali (1896-1987), beginning in 1929 a number of regional avifaunal surveys were undertaken in peninsular India. With the extensive new material from India available for comparison Whistler realised the desirability of conducting a similar survey in Sri Lanka to address questions concerning the status and distribution of forms common to India and Sri Lanka. A proposal was made by Whistler through Kinnear at the British Museum (Natural History) to the Sri Lankan authorities for an 'Avifaunal Survey of Ceylon' to be conducted jointly by the British and Colombo Museums. In Sri Lanka the project received much support from Phillips, who supervised the actual collecting by the Colombo Museum's Taxidermist E. C. Fernando and his staff. The survey was in operation from October 1936 to June 1939 and a total of 1,362 specimens was obtained. Whistler reported on several new records and subspecies from Sri Lanka in 1939-1942 and submitted his final report in 1942; it was published posthumously in *Spolia Zeylanica* (Vol. 23, Parts 3 and 4) in 1944. Whistler recognised some 384 species and subspecies of birds from Sri Lanka and provided a general analysis of Sri Lanka's birdlife. The main purpose of the 'Avifaunal Survey' was to identify the races of birds in Sri Lanka and clarify their relationship with forms in India. Whistler also attempted to determine breeding seasons from a study of moult patterns and gonadal condition. In spite of the interruption of the survey due to the 1939-1945 war and the trying circumstances under which Whistler studied the material, the 'Avifaunal Survey' was a success. In 1947 the Colombo Museum received from the British Museum (Natural History) its share of the 'Avifaunal Survey' material, amounting to 707 bird skins.

During the war the American ornithologist Sidney Dillon Ripley (*b.* 1913) was stationed in Sri Lanka from September 1943 to September 1945. Encouraged by Phillips, who had been trying to fill the gaps left by the premature termination of the 'Avifaunal Survey', and by Paulus Edward Pieris Deraniyagala (1900-1973), first Sri Lankan Director of the Department of National Museums, Ripley made a collection of some 432 specimens at a wide range of localities. A collection of 157 skins was also made during the war by Herbert Girton Deignan (1906-1968) mainly in the Central Province. Based on this material, deposited at the United States National Museum (National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution), and additional specimens at the USNM and the American Museum of Natural



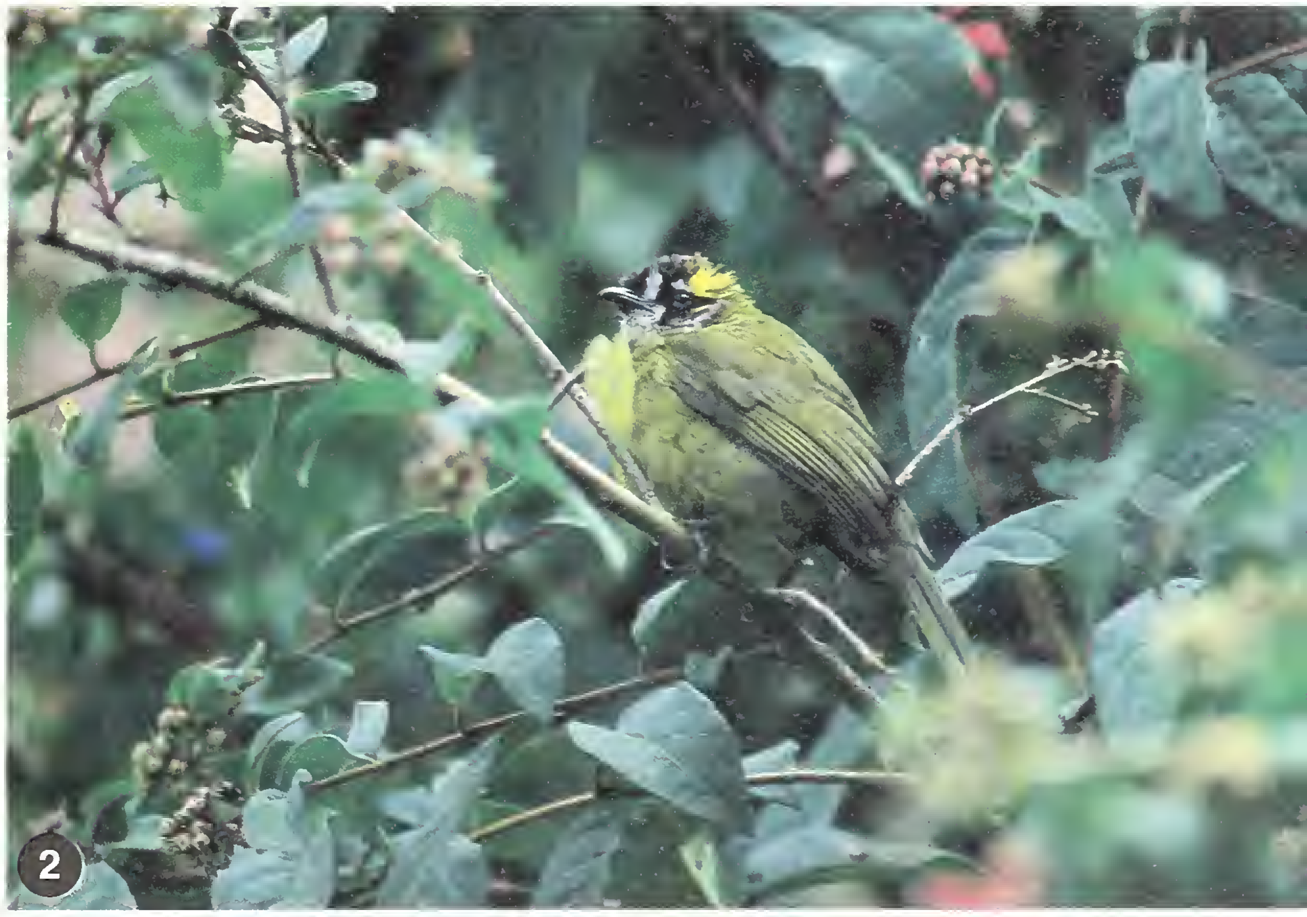
Endemic species described during the 19th century from Sri Lanka

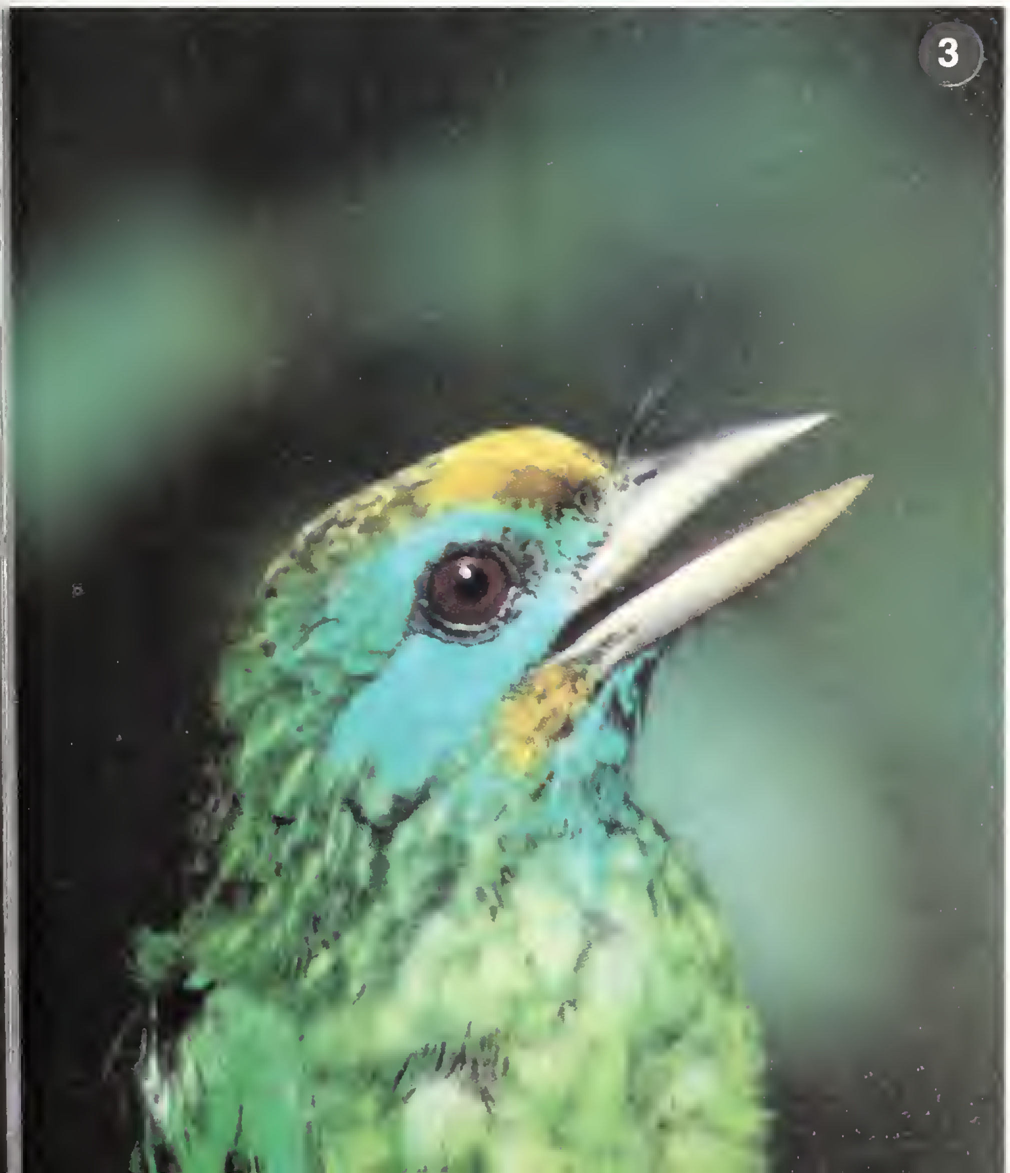
1: Spot-winged Thrush
Zoothera spiloptera
(Photo: Tim Loseby).

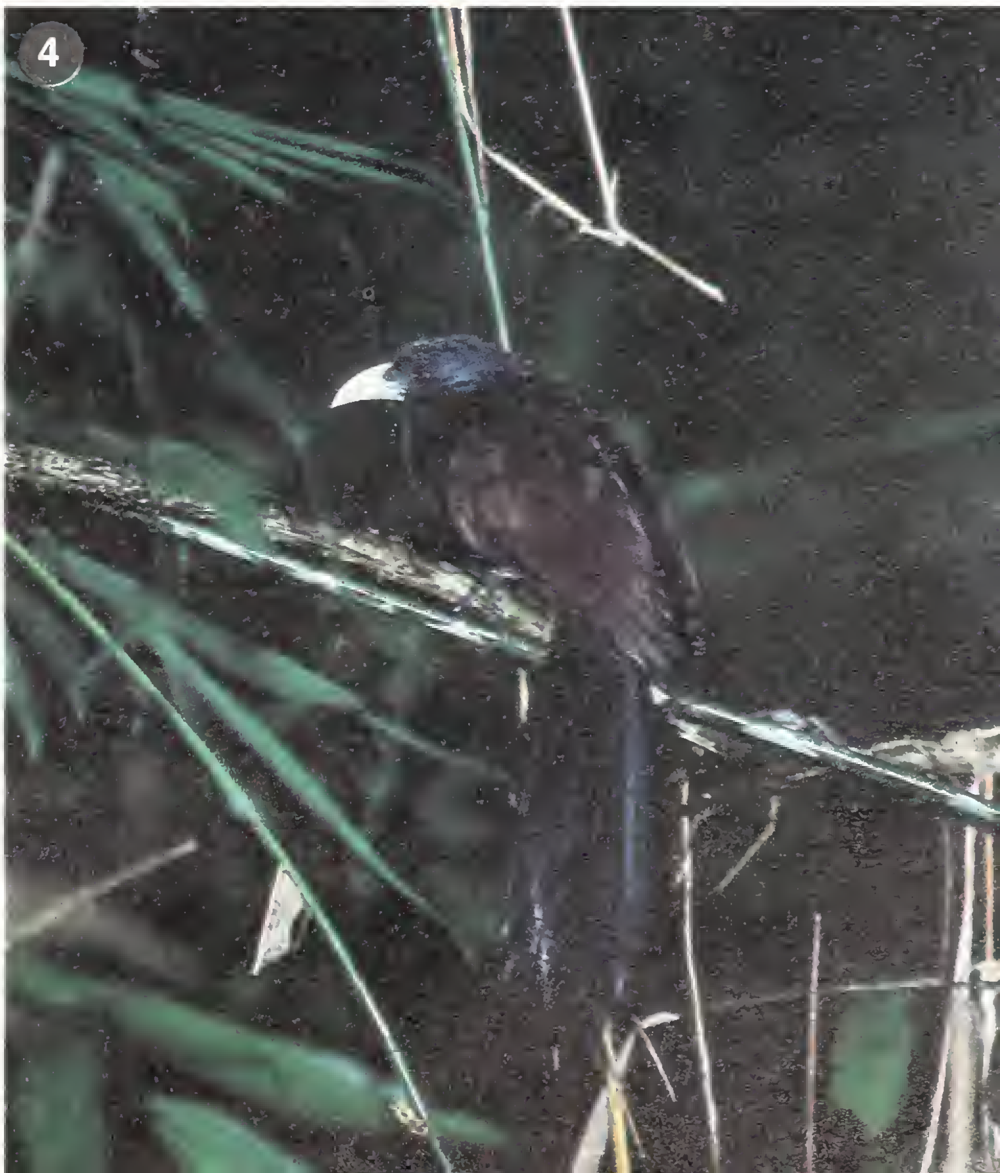
2: Yellow-eared Bulbul
Pycnonotos penicillatus
(Photo: Tim Loseby).

3: Yellow-fronted Barbet
Megalaima flavifrons
(Photo: Julia Jones).

4: Green-billed Coucal
Centropus chlororhynchus
(Photo: Simon Harrap).







History, Ripley wrote a supplement to Whistler's work which appeared in *Spolia Zeylanica* in 1946. An attempt was made in it to bring the taxonomy and nomenclature of Sri Lankan birds into line with the latest revisions. A few years later, based on Whistler's and Ripley's papers and with further advice from Ripley at the Smithsonian Institution and E. Banks at the British Museum (Natural History), Phillips compiled an up-to-date checklist of Sri Lankan birds which was published in 1953 covering some 407 species and subspecies. For many years a need had been felt for a comprehensive illustrated book on Sri Lanka's birds for field identification. A few illustrated works by Cicely Lushington (née Kershaw) (1902?-1987) and by Phillips had appeared but these were intended to be nothing more than introductory books. The challenge was finally taken up by G. M. Henry who, after retiring from the Museum in 1946, settled in England and devoted his time to writing and illustrating his well known book, *A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon* (1955). With its accurate and life-like pictures and clear, informative text, Henry's *Guide* proved to be invaluable to all interested in the birds of Sri Lanka. Including as it did many original observations on the habits and distribution of Sri Lankan birds the book was much more than an identification guide. Perhaps no other book published in this century has had a greater impact on the study of Sri Lanka's birds than Henry's *Guide*.

In 1961 Ripley published his *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan*. It was the first major revision of the Indian subcontinent's birds since Baker's work and introduced numerous changes in taxonomy and nomenclature as a result of the publication since 1931 of the *Check-list of Birds of the World* by James Lee Peters (1889-1952) and various systematic revisions by Jean Delacour (1890-1985), Ernst Mayr (*b.* 1904), Herbert G. Deignan, Dean Amadon (*b.* 1912), Charles Vaurie (1906-1975), Biswamoy Biswas (1923-1994), Ripley and others. These studies were heavily influenced by the polytypic/biological species concept of neo-Darwinian theory and frequently treated related but morphologically clearly distinct allopatric forms as subspecies of widespread species. In many respects it was the culmination of a trend started in India by Baker and continued by Whistler and others. In spite of this shortcoming the *Synopsis* was undoubtedly a major contribution to Indo-Sri Lankan ornithology and provided the systematic framework for Ali and Ripley's monumental *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1968-1974, 10 volumes). The information on Sri Lankan birds in these two works owes much to the publications of Phillips and Henry. A second edition of Henry's book was published in 1971 and a new edition of Phillips's checklist dealing with some 427 forms was issued in 1978.

The general decline in specimen collecting with the rise in 'scientific natural history' (ecology, ethology, etc.) and recreational birding was a phenomenon that was seen in many countries by the middle of the present century. Although the first and last were also true in Sri Lanka, to date only a very few ecological studies have been undertaken (e.g. de Zoysa & Raheem 1990). Because of this much of what is currently known about Sri Lanka's birds derives mainly from the observations of amateur ornithologists and birders over the years. In 1943 the Ceylon Bird Club was formed by a few individuals who had been exchanging information about birds. Since then the Club's monthly newsletter *Ceylon Bird Club Notes* has been issued regularly and features lists of birds observed at various localities, notes on breeding habits, dates of arrival and departure of migrants, etc. and is one of the most useful sources of information on the distribution of birds in Sri Lanka. Additionally, the Club provides information to birders from overseas, and organises the mid-January waterfowl census. The Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, based at the Department of Zoology, University of Colombo, was formed around 1977. While serving as a birding organisation it also promotes the scientific study of birds and issues a newsletter called *Malkoha*.

At present a total of about 467 forms of birds (representing about 429 monotypic or polytypic species) are known from Sri Lanka and although accidentals and vagrants will continue to be reported from time to time it seems unlikely that any new resident species will be discovered in the future. However, even in the area of descriptive studies much remains to be learned, such as age-, sex- and season-related plumage differences and geographic variation. Our knowledge of the behaviour and vocalisations of all species is rudimentary and few, if any, calls have been recorded and described analytically (e.g. by means of sonagrams). Knowledge of the life histories of most Sri Lankan birds amounts to little more than an accumulation of chance observations, with almost nothing on record for the rarer or more secretive species. Two projects which deserve priority at present are (*a*) mapping the current distribution of all species and subspecies of Sri Lankan birds and (*b*) detailed ecological studies of birds most vulnerable to environmental changes through narrow habitat requirements (e.g. forests, grasslands, wetlands), trophic position (e.g. raptors), etc. While special expertise and facilities may be required in the latter type of study the participation of many knowledgeable amateurs is essential for the success of projects like the former. In the study of Sri Lanka's birds today as in the past there are many opportunities for contribution by birders and ornithologists alike.

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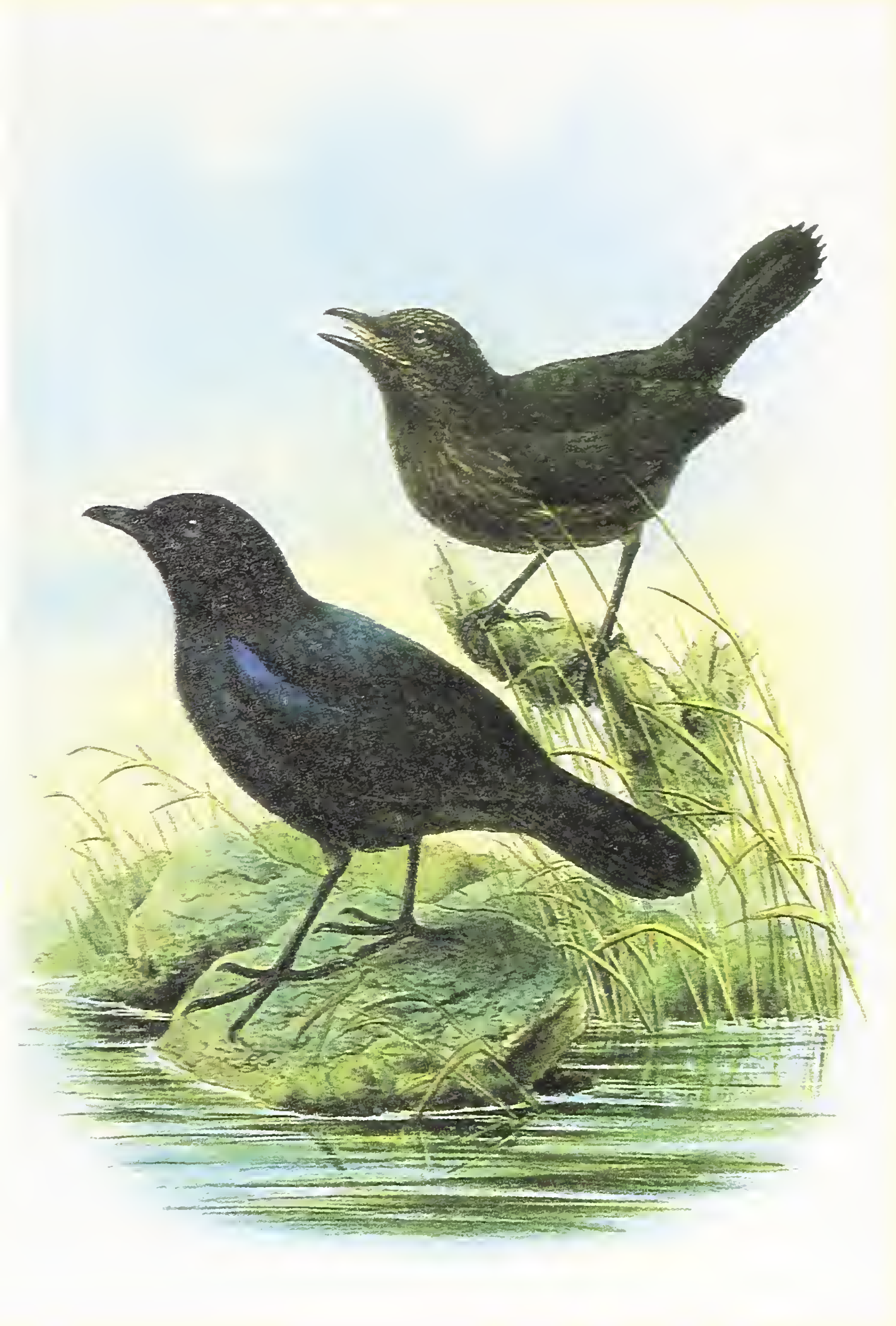

Illustration (Bligh's Whistling Thrush) by J. Gould from *Birds of Asia*. vol. 3: plate 27. London 1850-1883. Reproduced with kind permission of The Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

LESTER PERERA.

Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi*
Painting by Lester Perera

Some observations on the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush

The Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi* is probably the least reported of the Sri Lankan endemic birds. In this article Deepal Warakagoda concentrates on some of the previously unknown facts about this species's biology and habits based on his personal observations over several years.

Although birders regularly visit areas where the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi* is known to occur, few ever get the opportunity to observe it. The reason for this is its elusiveness. The thrush is naturally rare and is confined to a comparatively small range in the higher hills of the central mountain massif. There it is found from about 1,200 m up to over 2,100 m. It is categorised as a globally threatened species.[1]

The species is sexually dimorphic. The male's plumage is generally black with a blue sheen. The female is brown, a shade paler on the underparts. Both sexes have a bright blue patch at the carpal joint of the wings which is distinct in flight but otherwise rather inconspicuous.

The species is strictly a ground-dwelling mountain forest bird. It is secretive and prefers to inhabit dense vegetation by streams and ponds. It only emerges into the open at dusk and dawn, when it actively hops about and feeds on the open rocks and logs in or by the water. It is usually the male which is seen at these times; the female normally always avoids the open. However she usually remains close by in the undergrowth as she is frequently heard responding to the occasional calls of her mate.

The call is described as a shrill, sibilant whistle, *sreee....ree*.[2] However, more often than not only the first syllable is uttered. This monosyllabic call is usually made a few times in succession and occasionally it is repeated several times at more or less regular intervals. The high-pitched call is able to penetrate even the loud noise of rushing water, so the presence of a whistling thrush can be detected even near a waterfall. Males usually call at dusk and dawn before and after they emerge into the open. They may also call infrequently at other times of the day, mainly during the breeding season which falls in the first half of the year.

The Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush is a territorial species and a pair will maintain their territory year-round. The intensity of the male's calls is moderate, yet powerful enough to maintain a fairly large territory and to deter other rival males. If the call of another male is heard too close to the territory, the owner will soon threaten the intruder by calling back. If he responds, the resident male will quickly move towards the intruder, calling all the while. When used as a threat, the monosyllabic call is usually uttered in succession, in the manner of a song. In such a situation the call becomes more powerful than usual. Between the calls the two birds also utter a sort of scolding song, a rather weak and somewhat complex jumble composed of high-pitched notes which are more musical than the normal call. Both males climb into shrubs and trees and move from branch to branch while calling and moving towards each other. If they happen to meet, they vigorously fly to and fro whilst calling, but do not actually engage in physical contact. This threatening display will last until one bird retreats.

The species has a kind of communal roosting behaviour where territories adjoin. The birds roost at night in trees close to where the territory boundaries meet. Just before dawn the roosting males start uttering the normal calls as well as the scolding song, which are continued until the birds disperse at dawn itself. I have noticed four males calling at a single roost before they leave for the interior of their respective territories.

The Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush is a shy and elusive bird by nature. It usually vanishes into the undergrowth at the slightest disturbance. However, when a male challenges another they tolerate human presence to some extent. Sometimes a lone male feeding in the open may ignore people in the vicinity. One morning I observed, together with two other birders, a male which freely fed for nearly 30 minutes in our presence at a water hole. In another instance three birders and I came across a pair feeding in the open. As we approached, the female slowly disappeared into the bushes. But the male fed for several more minutes before it also crept into the dense undergrowth. Soon thereafter the male appeared on a low branch only about 5 m away from us, with a nearly half-grown lizard (either

Ceratophora sp. or *Calotes* sp.) in its bill. The bird struggled for about 10 minutes until it managed to swallow the lizard, as this prey was rather too large for it. I have experienced few other instances of similar indifference to the presence of humans.

The Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush feeds mainly on insects supplemented with lizards and the like. The late naturalist P. B. Karunarathe (pers. comm.) suggested a reason for the birds' crepuscular activity in the open near water. He argued that it could be due to the high insect activity during early and late hours in the highlands. On a few occasions during the daytime he came across a whistling thrush feeding where no water was present. Subsequently several other people have noted this behaviour.

Because it is so secretive in its habits, the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush is frequently overlooked. My own observations from the Nuwara Eliya, Hakgala and Horton Plains regions indicate that the species is not so rare as generally thought. At least in these areas the species is found in reasonable numbers in suitable habitat. In the recent past, the species has also been recorded in the Peak Wilderness and the Knuckles Range. In fact the small distribution range covers only about 1,700 km^2, about 2.6% of the total land area of Sri Lanka. However, the actual forest cover within this area, the essential habitat for this species, is only about 700 km^2, about 1% of the land area of Sri Lanka, and about 4.6% of the total forest cover. This makes the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush undoubtedly the most restricted in range of the Sri Lankan hill birds. Its specific adaptation to a particular niche of the forest environment will further affect the chances of survival for this species. Today it is being pushed step by step towards extinction by the continuous rapid destruction of its habitat in the hill forests of Sri Lanka.

Acknowledgements

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Little-known Oriental bird

Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*

The cuckoos are a fascinating group with a cosmopolitan distribution, and exhibit great diversity of form and life history. Owing to their generally secretive nature, many cuckoos are among the least known of the world's birds, and the Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* is no exception.

The large-billed and boldly patterned malkohas are restricted to the Oriental region, and are represented in Sri Lanka by Blue-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*, Sirkeer Malkoha *P. leschenaultii* and Red-faced Malkoha *P. pyrrhocephalus*. The former two are also found in South India, but even the distributional range of the last remains the subject of controversy. This article aims to provide a summary of current knowledge, indicate the status of current populations and examine possible future trends.

Taxonomy

The Red-faced Malkoha was described in 1769 by an illustration in Thomas Pennant's *Indian Zoology* as *Cuculus pyrrhocephalus*. Joan Gideon Loten, who collected the first examples, commissioned Pieter Cornelis de Bevere to paint plates of his living or freshly dead specimens, as methods for the preservation of skins were then poorly developed. Loten loaned these outstanding plates to various zoologists at the time, who described many species from his work. Pennant's work can still be found in the library of the British Museum, but there is no trace at that institution of Loten's specimens, also thought to be deposited there.[16,21] This form subsequently became the type of *Phaenicophaeus* Stephens (Shaw's *Gen. Zool.*, 9, pt. 1, 1815, p. 58). The genus has variously been considered to contain up to twelve species, but is now sometimes treated as monotypic, following Peters[17] and later authors but *contra* Sibley and Monroe.[18]

Distribution and Habitat

Within Sri Lanka, the range of the Red-faced Malkoha has been contracting for many years, in parallel with the drastic reduction in forest cover. Legge shot a pair as far north as Trincomalee in about 1870, when 70-80% of the island was covered with forest (Hoffmann *in litt.*), but it is probable that the main centre of the range has always been in the wet zone (south-western part of the island) where the main requirement seems to be tall, undisturbed, heavy forest with dense, tangled undergrowth. It is rarely seen near cultivation.[20] Remaining isolated populations within the dry zone (north and east Sri Lanka) are found exclusively in riverine forests such as Wasgomuwa National Park, along the Heen Ganga, and Kumbukkan Oya, Menik Ganga and at Lahugala.[10] It is probably rarer in the dry zone than in the wet zone. There is great vertical utilisation of the forest. Most reports indicate that it prefers the foliage canopy of trees and shrubs, but it also descends almost to the ground, especially where the understorey is thick (Warakagoda *in litt.*). It is said by Fisher *et al.*[6] to favour undergrowth, and indeed may breed at lower levels within the forest.

The Red-faced Malkoha has been reported from sea level up to 1,700 m.[2] A specimen (1951.25.30) in the British Museum of Natural History at Tring (BMNH) was collected on 15th August 1950 at Haputale at a stated altitude of 1,539 m, although there are doubts that it still occurs regularly at such altitude. Many contemporary observers have not observed this species at high elevations, and de Silva (*in litt.*) has suggested that fragmentation of formerly continuous forest cover has denied the Red-faced Malkoha access to the highlands. It is possible that it is (or was) a seasonal altitudinal migrant. Further detailed study is required to test this hypothesis.

Although the Red-faced Malkoha is considered by many authors to be one of the 26 species restricted to Sri Lanka, there are a couple of controversial and intriguing records from the Tamil Nadu and Kerala provinces of South India. Baker[3] indicates that it was found in the 'South of Travancore, where it was obtained by Stewart together with its nests'. This rather vague reference was followed in November 1931 with a report by C. H. Biddulph of a Red-faced Malkoha in the Madurai district of southern Tamil Nadu.

This was eventually published in 1956[4] and, while accepted by Ali[1] and Ali and Ripley,[2] is tantalisingly inconclusive. Salim Ali later agreed with the Ceylon Bird Club that lacking a specimen from India it should be treated as a Sri Lankan endemic. Biddulph says, 'I noted its approximate size and shape, colouration, shape of beak and length of tail in relation to the body', but unfortunately does not give these details in the note. See Hoffmann[10] for a reasoned rejection of this record, who demonstrates that it would not stand up to a modern records committee, but see also below. The habitat in the Madurai area is considered unsuitable for Red-faced Malkoha.[19] A 1935 Indian record referred to by Fisher *et al.*[6] is presumably an error.

Yet another twist in this story is provided by a recent note in the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*[15] in which a sighting of this species near Madikeri in Karnataka province is reported. The observer and his wife described the bird independently and came to the conclusion that it was a Red-faced Malkoha. Following this, Hoffmann[11] reports receiving a painting of a 'Red-faced Malkoha' from a correspondent in Trivandrum - the bird depicted is considered by Hoffmann to most resemble the Green-billed Malkoha *P. tristis*, a Lower Himalayan species! The safest treatment is to consider the Red-faced Malkoha a Sri Lankan endemic until watertight records for south India are published with descriptions. It is strange that such a distinctive species has been responsible for a debate of this nature.

Plumage and Variation

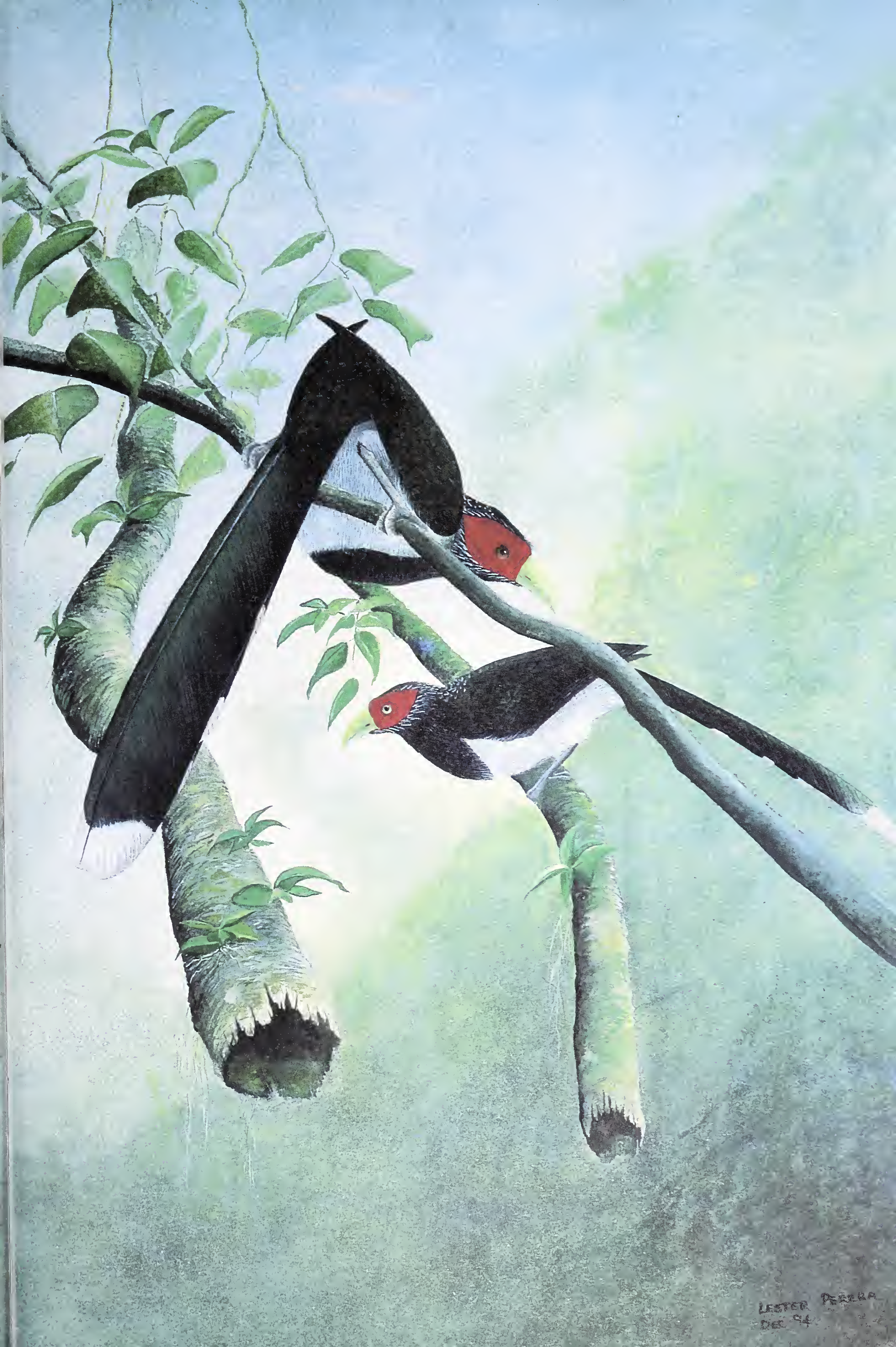
The Red-faced Malkoha is approximately the size of a Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* (40-50 cm). Legge[13] indicates that the female may be the larger of the two sexes, but measurements are too scanty to be sure. No weights have been published. Biometrics of skins examined in BMNH (RF, pers. obs.) indicated that males may be bigger and longer-billed, although shorter-tailed than females, but sample sizes were small. It should be noted that these measurements are not comparable with those taken from live birds, as certain biometrics may change with time from death, and great care has to be taken when measuring specimens to avoid damage. They are presented here only to highlight possible sexual dimorphism.

Adult Red-faced Malkohas are black above, glossed with metallic green and blue. The feathers of the crown, nape and chin are flecked with white, the extent of which is subject to marked individual variation. The throat and breast are also black, but the rest of the underparts are white. When viewed from underneath, as this species usually is, it appears strikingly black and white. The tail is long and graduated, and underneath appears black at the base and distally white or pied; it is black above with a white terminal bar. The crimson-red face is not bare, but composed of short, bristly hair-like feathers, and in many birds these protrude above the crown. The large, laterally compressed bill is apple-green, the lower mandible slightly paler, and is dusky towards the base and around the nostrils. Feet and legs are bluish, bluish-green or slate-blue. Bold patterning coupled with long tail, red face and green bill make this species extremely distinctive. However, there is at least one seriously misleading description in the literature; Wikramanayake[22] asserts that 'its green body and red face make identification a simple matter'! The plumage of the sexes is thought to be identical, but irides are white in females and brown in males.[2] Legge shot a male in tail moult in December 1871.

Juveniles are shorter-tailed than adults, show a much reduced, brick-red face patch and a browner bill. The crown, nape and breast have a brownish ground colour, with off-white flecks in the crown, nape and chin. Although the mantle is black with blue and green iridescence, the remiges and rectrices are browner, and have more pointed tips (R. F., pers. obs. BMNH).

A variety of call notes has been described, but this species is generally considered rather silent. Legge[13] compares a low monosyllabic *'kaa'* uttered in flight and on alighting with one of the notes of 'our jay at home' (*Garrulus glandarius*?). He also talks of a much harsher and louder cry which *contra* Hoffmann[10] is not inconsistent with Biddulph's description of the call he heard from a perched bird in India, although Legge does not refer to this call in a later work.[14] A low petulant *'kra'*, a soft *'krrr'* compared with the purring of a cat, *'kree-kree-kree'*, a *'kok'* and short yelping whistles are also described.

Red-faced Malkoha
Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus
Painting by Lester Perera


LESTER PERERA
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Breeding

Dated records and gonadal examinations indicate that Red-faced Malkohas breed at least from January to May and probably again in the autumn, and Ali & Ripley[2] suggest that breeding may be continuous. More dated records of breeding evidence are required. The nest is usually described as a shallow saucer of grass, roots and twigs 'carelessly' put together, although what appears untidy to the human observer should probably not be anthropomorphised as careless; indeed, an untidy nest is probably better camouflaged.

In May 1978, Shirley Perera observed a breeding attempt on the banks of the Walawe River in the Uda-Walawe National Park. The well-anchored and well-concealed nest was in the topmost fork of a kunumella tree *Diospyros malabarica* about 9-12 m from the ground. The stout platform was formed of interlocking branching twigs 15-20 cm long; over this was placed a thick layer of twigs, presumably imparting the untidy appearance, and over this a layer of kunumella leaves. The cup was deep and neatly lined with leaf midribs, although Baker[3] indicates that the nest is shallow and lined with fresh leaves. Both sexes participated in nest building, and during a period of about a week, the male was observed following the female uttering a soft *'kree-kree-kree'*. Unfortunately this nest was abandoned owing to disturbance from a pair of Greater Racket-tailed Drongos *Dicrurus paradiseus* nesting nearby (Perera, *in litt.*). A nest found in the Sinharaja forest in February 1995 was in dense foliage in the lower canopy of a tree ca. 18 m high. One bird was incubating.

The clutch consists of two or three rounded oval eggs, measuring about 36 x 27 mm and unmarked white with a chalky surface. There are no details of subsequent stages of breeding, although a pair 'soon returned' to their nest after being flushed.[3]

Diet and Habits

This species feeds mainly on berries of forest trees, but insects are also taken (perhaps when feeding young?). One has been observed eating a large caterpillar about 5 cm long, and another taking the caterpillars of a common moth pest of teak (*Ceylon Bird Club Notes*). It usually feeds in mixed-species foraging groups where one to four birds is the norm. Larger flocks occur occasionally; the largest reported group is of nine birds.

The Red-faced Malkoha is described as a rather silent, shy, restless and sprightly dweller of tall forest canopy. Fleming[7] describes this bird as agile, active and conspicuous, although wary of observers, and he indicates that it is active mainly in the morning and afternoon. Henry[8] presents a vivid picture of its locomotion, 'It cleverly threads its way through tangled twigs, creepers and foliage. Owing to the short, rounded wings, its flight is feeble, slow and direct and, if it has any distance to cover, it commonly prefers to hop from branch to branch until it reaches the top of a tree, and then to flutter and volplane from that vantage-point; in flight, the wings produce a musical hum.' Legge[13] notes that a female, 'on alighting each time, uttered its low call and elevated its tail', and that a pair 'flew with short flights from tree to tree, one after the other.'

Status and Frequency

The Red-faced Malkoha is currently listed as Vulnerable.[5] It faces a high risk of extinction in the medium-term future through habitat decline and fragmentation, and will show an estimated continuing decline of at least 10% within 10 years.[12]

Since 1873, the Red-faced Malkoha has been considered everything from 'extremely rare' to 'quite common' in no obvious chronological order, although care must be taken when describing the status of a localised species, which may be common in some areas but rare as a whole. There can be little doubt that the retiring habits of this largely silent dense forest canopy-dweller result in some under-observation, and this may account for the varying estimates of its abundance; reports that it was common in antiquity are probably exaggerated. Many dire warnings have been sounded,[6,8,22] and it could be argued that numbers have remained relatively stable since the middle of the present century. However, advances in quality and quantity of field ornithology in Sri Lanka may mean that a growing proportion of a dwindling population is being recorded.

Shooting has been cited as contributory to the apparent decline at least in the dry zone.[9] Reports indicate that the flesh is tender and not unpleasantly flavoured,[8] but hunting is unlikely to be a widespread contemporary problem (Wijesinghe *in litt.*). The Red-faced Malkoha is undoubtedly local, owing to fragmentation of its forest habitat; it is not uncommon in some restricted areas[9] and enforced protection of key forest reserves, e.g. Sinharaja and surroundings, is generally considered essential to its continued survival. It is important to note that some ornithologists do not consider this species to be under particular *actual* threat (e.g. Perera *in litt.*), providing the integrity of current forest reserves is maintained. However, this is a rather large proviso. Under the Flora and Fauna Protection Ordinance, many National Parks and Sanctuaries have been declared, but development continues unchecked in many areas and laws are rarely enforced. Unless a coordinated strategy is adopted, continuing fragmentation of forest reserves may result in the extinction of this, and several other Sri Lankan endemics. Hoffmann[10] has cited the presence of various international conservation organisations in Colombo as exacerbating this problem, each of them not wanting to bite the hand that feeds, and it is perhaps time for these organisations to review critically their role in the process of conservation in Sri Lanka.

Very little of the Red-faced Malkoha's life history has been recorded, particularly its breeding biology, biometrics and moult strategies. Its geographical and altitudinal distributions remain controversial, population densities and dynamics, detailed niche requirements and threats to survival other than deforestation are all unknown.

As far as its conservation is concerned, there is an urgent need for further study of the Red-faced Malkoha, to paint a rational picture of the status of this enigmatic species. Too many dire warnings can result in desensitisation of the public and the government, and it is imperative that such warnings are based on firm empirical study to ensure that what little political will there is can be harnessed to the greatest effect. At this stage, it seems safe to say that further fragmentation of forest habitat will certainly result in further decline of this beautiful cuckoo.

The authors are currently working on a monograph of the cuckoos and turacos.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Thilo Hoffmann, Deepal Warakagoda, Shirley Perera, Gehan de Silva and Priyantha Wijesinghe for providing valuable information during the preparation of this article. We are also very grateful to Thilo Hoffmann for helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

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Birds of

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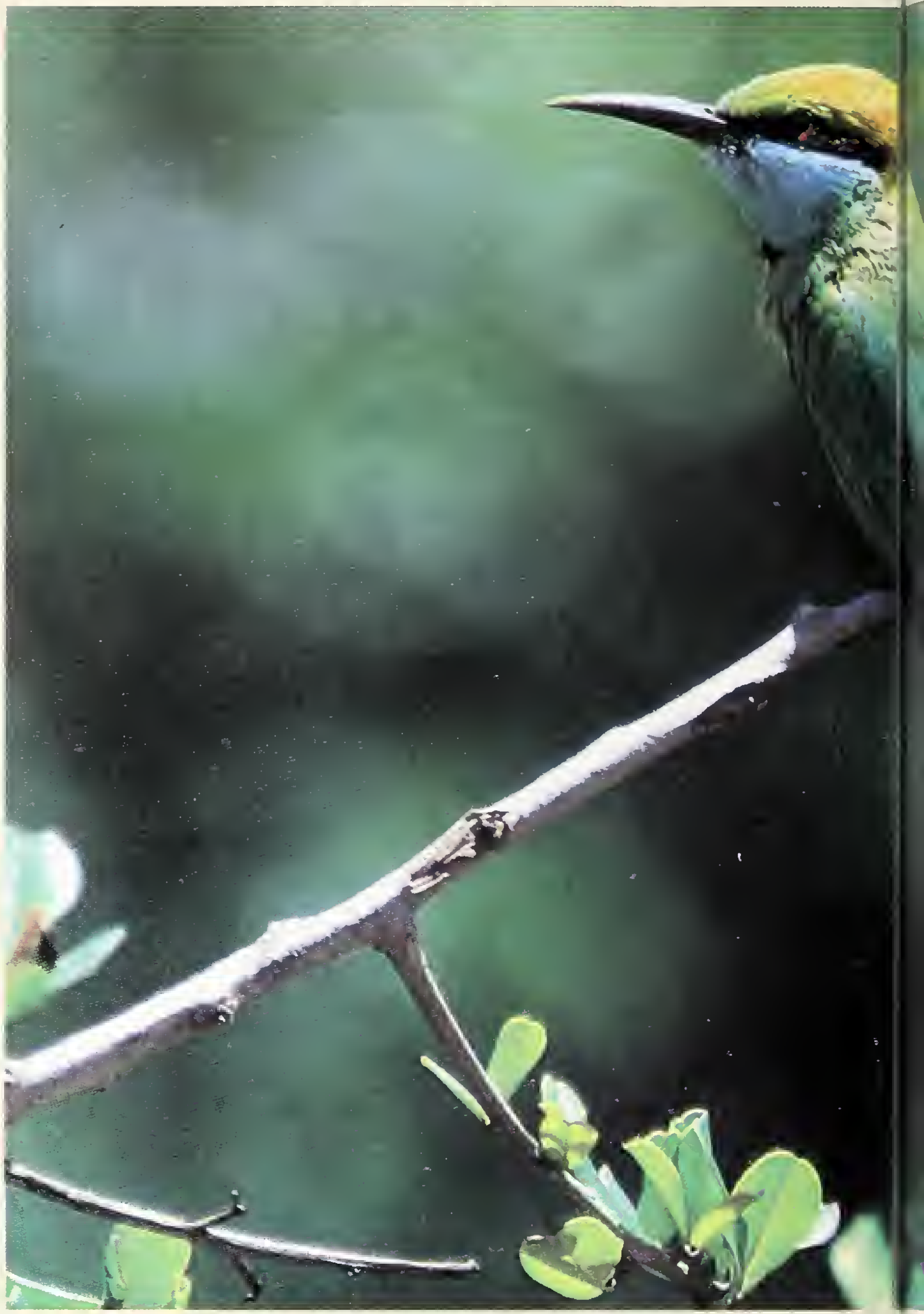
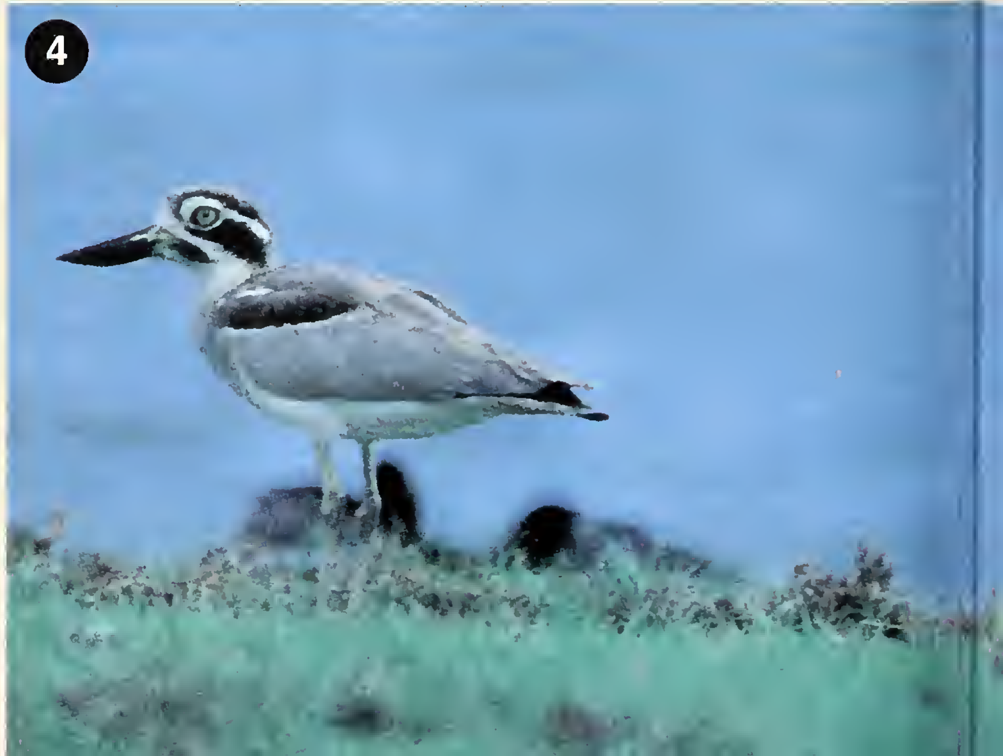


1: Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* (Photo: Gehan de Silva).

2: Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* (Photo: Dr H. I. E. Katugaha).

3: Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithacus* (Photo: Billy Simpson).

4: Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris* (Photo: Billy Simpson).



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Sri Lanka

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5: Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* (Photo: Dr H. I. E. Katugaha).

6: Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii* (Photo: Billy Simpson).

7: Dull-blue Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* (Photo: Billy Simpson).

8: Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* (Photo: Gehan de Silva).

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Watching seabirds on the west coast of Sri Lanka

Although the majority of birders visiting Sri Lanka concentrate on searching for the endemic species, they overlook the fact that the west coast provides an opportunity for observing some truly exciting seabirds.

From an ornithological point of view Sri Lanka can be considered to be an oceanic island – it is bounded on all sides by the Indian Ocean.[1] Nearly fifty seabird species have been recorded on the west coast of Sri Lanka.[2] Of these, five are known to breed and three are suspected to do so.[3] The remaining species include several winter visitors, a few passage migrants, a summer breeding visitor and a number of vagrants, stragglers, and species whose status is currently uncertain. While the entire coast of the island is suitable for watching seabirds, most of the northern and eastern areas cannot currently be visited on account of a military conflict, so this article confines itself to the subject of seawatching on the western and south-western coast.

The best season for seawatching is during the south-west monsoon (usually May–October). Several species enter coastal waters at this time, among them the Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*, Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*, Brown Skua *Catharacta antarctica*, Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris*. A mass-migration of Bridled Terns *Sterna anaethetus* takes place during the south-west monsoon. This migration, which usually begins around June/July and continues until October/November, is often a spectacular phenomenon. In favourable years as many as 400,000 birds fly southwards during daytime – well within sight of land.[4] The most intensive movement occurs for a week or two in (either) August or September when, in the early mornings, 2,000 to 3,000 birds may fly south in a single hour, well within view of an observer on the beach.[5] The migrating Bridled Terns are at times accompanied by small numbers of Sooty Terns *S. fuscata*, skuas, boobies and shearwaters. Both the Pomarine and Brown Skuas kleptoparasitise the migrating terns by stealing their catches whenever opportunities arise. At present the area (or areas) of origin of the migrants is not known, nor is their ultimate destination. It is suspected that the migration is a post-breeding dispersal of birds nesting in possibly the Red and Arabian Seas, Makran coast of Pakistan and the Maldives. (As there is no reliable information regarding the migration at night, an observer equipped with a good night-vision scope could contribute useful information.) A less spectacular but equally interesting phenomenon which takes place during September and October is the southward migration of Flesh-footed Shearwaters *Puffinus carneipes*. These birds leave their breeding grounds in south-west Australia each May and embark on a lengthy 'continuous migration' which takes them north and west to the Arabian Sea and thence southwards past Sri Lanka, back to their homes in time for the next breeding season.[6] Using telescopes, the birds are best seen from shore as they engage in their characteristic version of low-level dynamic soaring; even so they are only observed with some difficulty as the shearwaters never approach closer than about 1.5 km to land. Detailed observations are therefore best conducted out at sea. Two interesting species which visit during the monsoon are the Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* (our only summer breeding visitor), which nests on small islets off the south-western coast around June/July, and the Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, a species which is frequently seen on the stretch of coast between Ambalangoda and Galle.

The intermonsoonal period (October/November) brings large numbers of Wilson's Storm-petrels relatively close inshore but, on account of their small size and habit of keeping close to the waves, they are not easily seen from land, hence they are best viewed out at sea. It is possible that these birds use Sri Lankan waters as a final staging area prior to their long return journey to breed in Antarctica. The intermonsoon

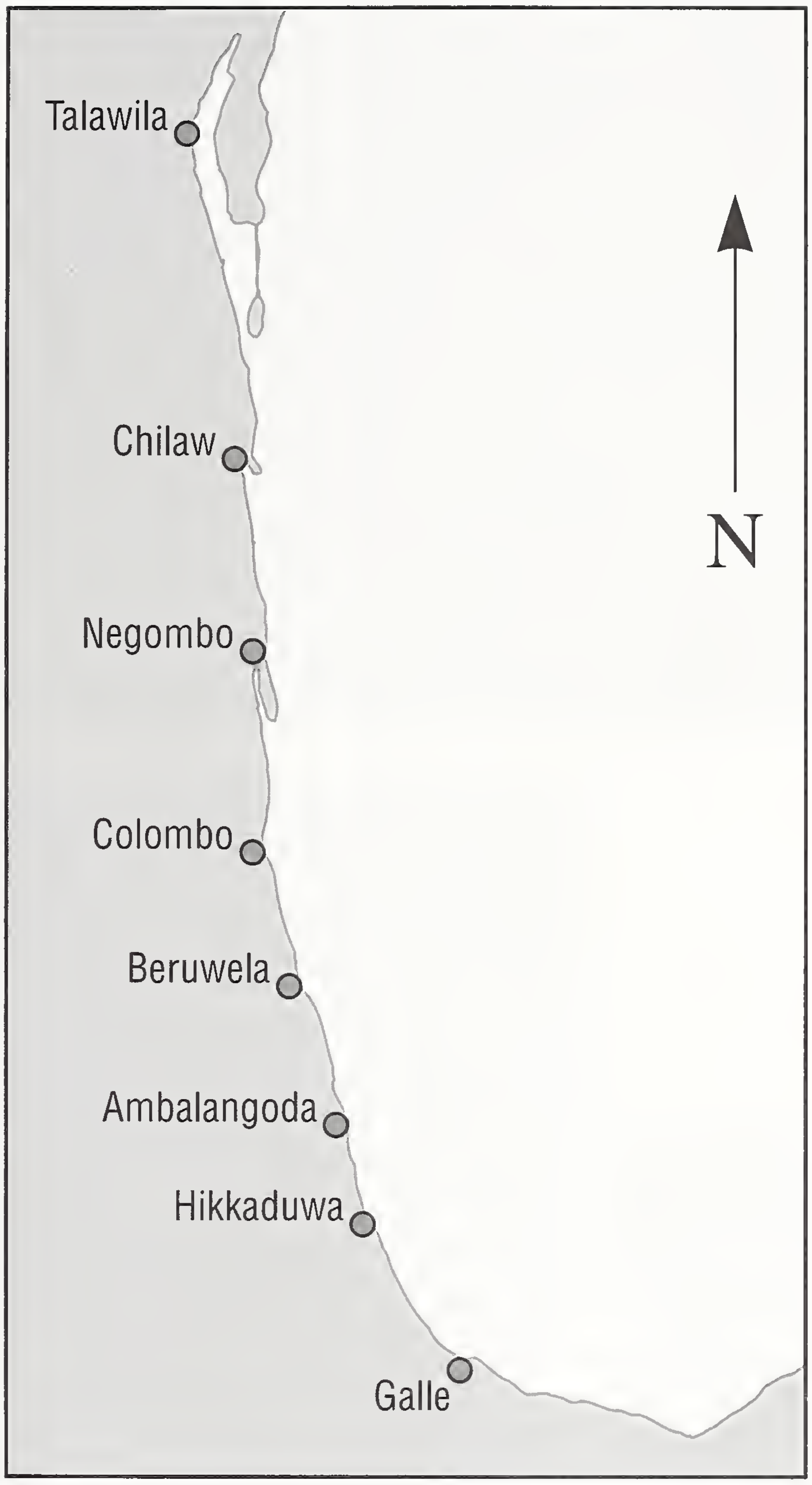
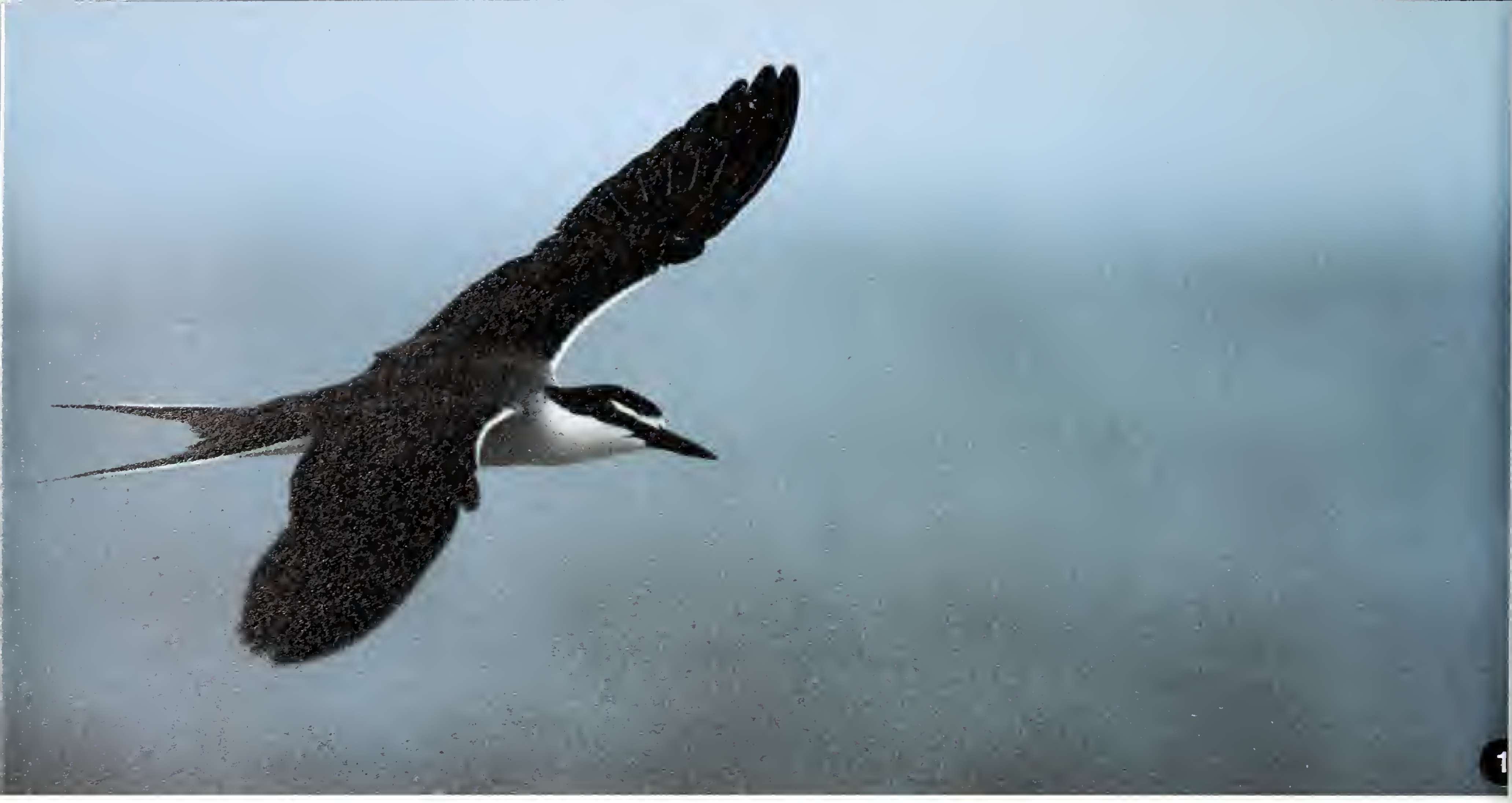


Figure 1: Seawatching locations in western Sri Lanka.

period also heralds the appearance of winter visitors (although small numbers may arrive earlier). Two of these species, the Pallas's Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* and Heuglin's Gull *L. heuglini* are mainly confined to the north-western coast, although some individuals do stray further southwards along the western seaboard. The Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus* visits in small numbers whereas the Brown-headed Gull *L. brunnicephalus* is rather common at this time of year. The Herring Gull *L. argentatus* is a scarce visitor to more remote areas of the coast. Many of our terns are winter visitors and species present in some numbers at this time are the Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (a small population may also be resident), Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*, Common Tern *S. hirundo*, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* (very common) and White-winged Tern *C. leucopterus*. The Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* appears to be a regular visitor in very small numbers. A species which probably visits more frequently than the records suggest is the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* which, in its winter plumage, is easily overlooked among the White-winged Terns with which it sometimes associates.

The Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*, Little Tern *S. albifrons* and Large Crested Tern *S. bergii* are breeding residents present throughout the year. Nesting areas of these species include small islets off the coast, the shallow banks known as 'Adam's Bridge' in the north-west, as well as the margins of larger 'tanks' (artificial irrigation reservoirs) and lagoons. The Gull-billed, Whiskered and Common Terns have been suspected of breeding in Sri Lanka, but conclusive evidence of this is lacking.[3]

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of seawatching on the west coast is the possibility of identifying rare vagrants and stragglers which turn up from time to time[2,6,7] It should be noted that many of the species listed below are based on sight records and include some species not yet officially accepted onto the Sri Lankan list. Hence further observations will obviously be of great value. Among the interesting vagrants visiting coastal waters are several species of petrels including the Cape Petrel *Daption capense*, White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lessonii*, Soft-plumaged Petrel *P. mollis*, Barau's Petrel *P. baraui* and Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*. Several species of shearwater also come within the category of 'rare vagrants' including the Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas*, Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* and Audubon's Shearwater *P. lherminieri*. (It is interesting to note that as a sighting of Sooty Shearwaters *P. griseus* has come from the east coast, individuals could possibly turn up on the west coast, hence birdwatchers should be on the alert for this species). Among the other vagrants recorded are the Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*, Masked Booby *S. dactylatra* (probably more common than the records indicate), Christmas Island Frigatebird *Fregata andrewsi*, Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*, South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki*, Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii* and White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*.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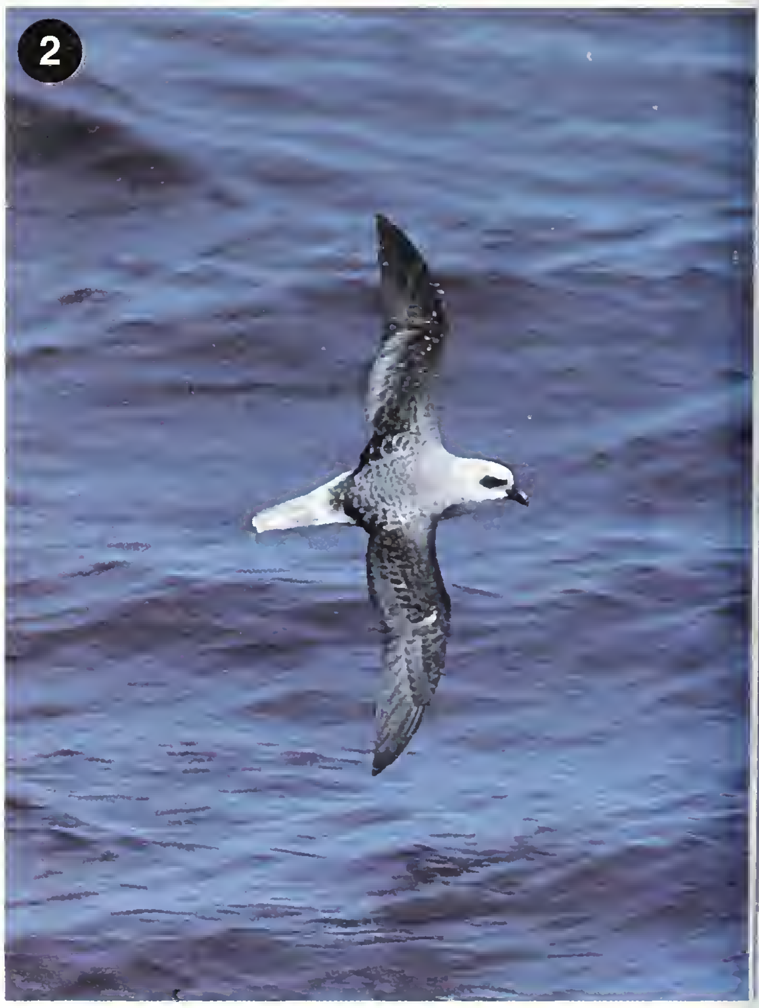
Seabirds of Sri Lanka

1: Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*

2 and 3: White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lesonii*

4: Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*

(Photos: Tony Palliser).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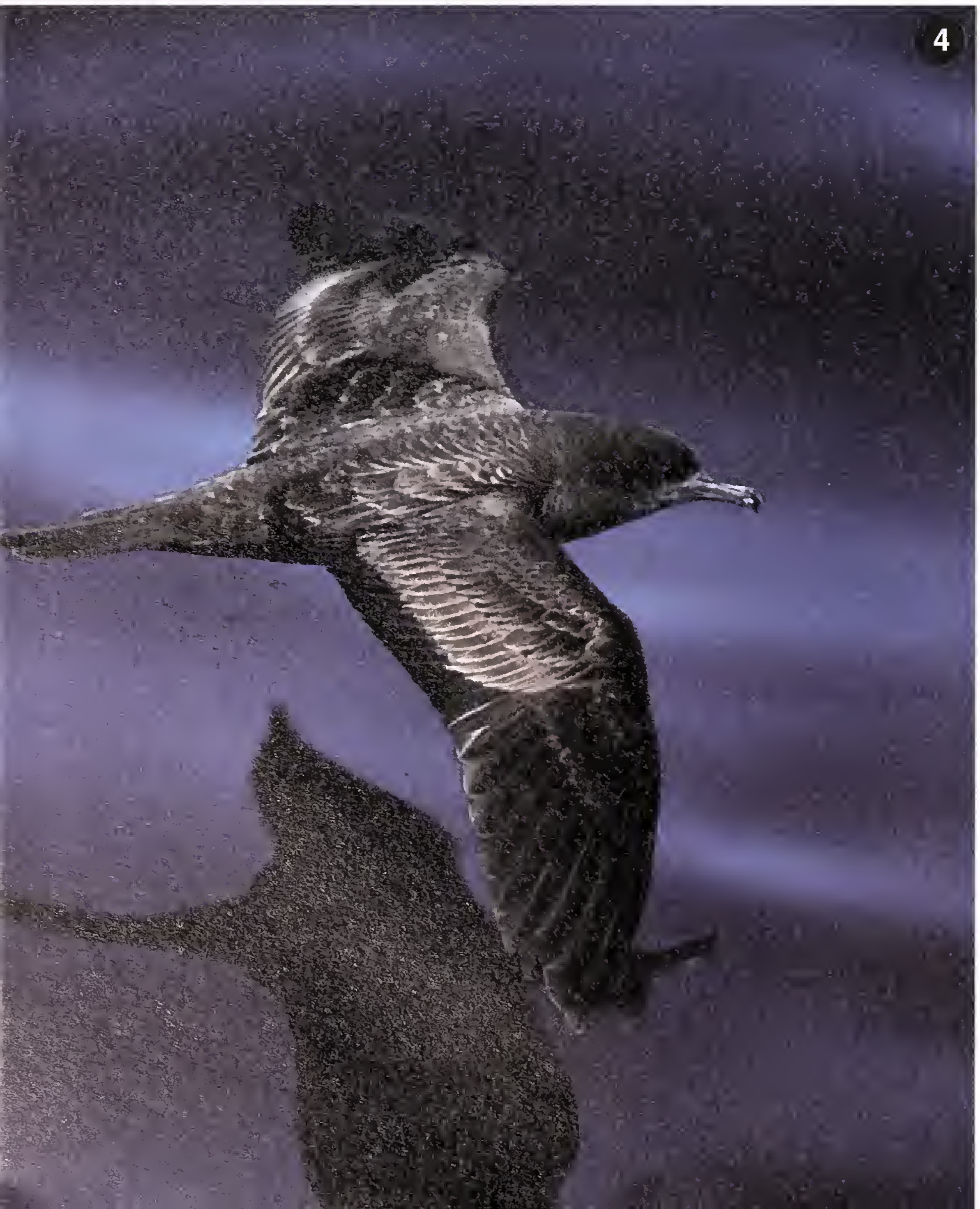
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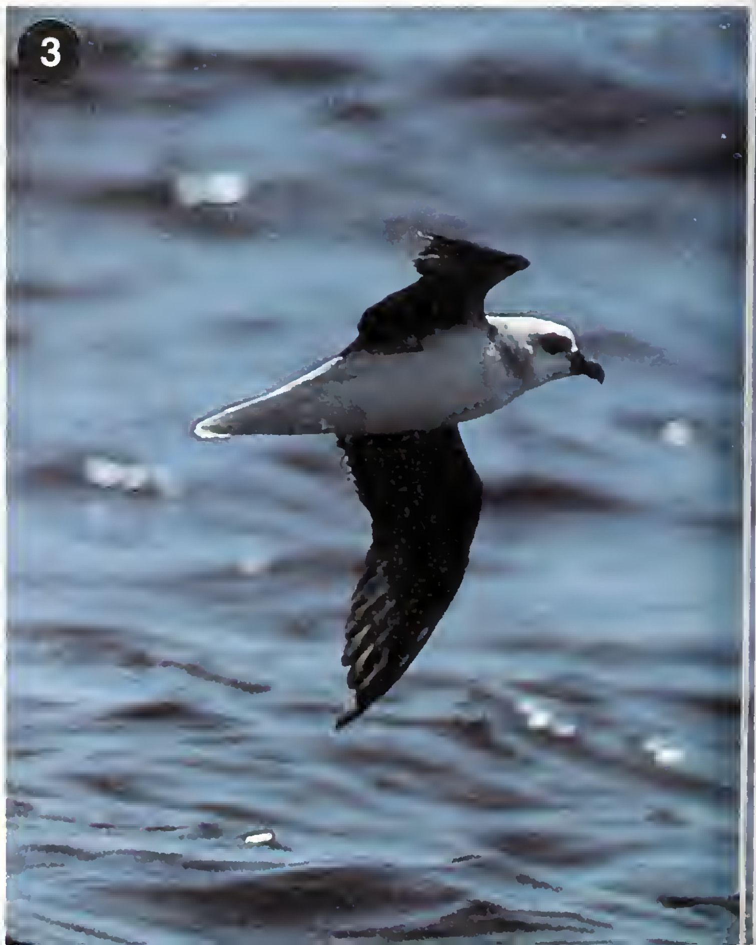
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Seawatching

Land-based seawatching can be carried out from practically anywhere on the western coast. Especially favourable locations are Talawila, Chilaw, Negombo, Colombo (and its coastal suburbs), Beruwela, Bentota, Ambalangoda, Hikkaduwa and Galle. The western coast is primarily of low elevation, few places having altitudes in excess of 50 m. The low coastal regions are suitable for studying the seabird migrations as the birds usually are low-flyers, hence a telescope at sea level will show more of the movement than would observing from a higher site.

The more adventurous seabird enthusiast will prefer to conduct observations from a boat out at sea. Regrettably, there are at present no organisations offering facilities catering specifically for the seawatcher (improvements may be on the way here). The seabird watcher may be compelled therefore to make use of local fishing craft. Outrigger canoes ('oru') can be used for working close to shore, but are uncomfortable and offer little protection from the elements. The larger mechanised fishing vessels are somewhat better although, even here, facilities can be rather spartan. All but the largest boats do not normally carry radio or safety equipment, but they usually operate within sight of each other for safety. (It is advisable to avoid 'theppams', which are streamlined log-rafts unsuited to birding). As the best seabird watching is during the south-west monsoon when rough seas, strong winds and rain are frequently present, the observer who is prepared to tolerate a degree of discomfort would, in all probability, be rewarded with some excellent birdwatching. (It is advisable to carry a rucksack containing food, drink, hat, light-weight waterproof jacket, sea-sickness pills, flashlight and, for those who are not strong swimmers, an inflatable life jacket). During the calm season (north-east monsoon, i.e. late November-April) it may be possible to hire a dive boat used by scuba divers or a sport-fishing charter boat; these are operated by several organisations at the main tourist centres such as Bentota, Hikkaduwa, etc., but are inclined to be rather expensive.

Many landbirds may be seen out at sea; frequently seen species include Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus,* Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* and Common Swallow *Hirundo rustica.* Migrating shorebirds such as Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea,* Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus,* Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* and others too numerous to list may also be seen. An added bonus for the fortunate seawatcher could be sightings of dolphins, manta rays, cruising sharks and even a humpback or sperm whale!

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Bridled Terns
Sterna anaethetus
by Rex De Silva

ClubWatch

Ceylon Bird Club Rarities Committee

With the growing interest in birdwatching in Sri Lanka, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, there was in increasing number of reports of rare and new birds. Thus in April 1985 the Ceylon Bird Club (established in 1944), the pioneer organisation devoted to the study and protection of birds in the country, created Sri Lanka's first formal Rarities Committee. Its purpose is to scrutinise and evaluate all reports of rare and new birds and establish the official record. Originally the Committee of six members scrutinised all past sight records, as well as several earlier specimen-based records with doubtful identifications or data. Its decisions were published in the monthly *Ceylon Bird Club Notes*. Subsequently fresh Committee decisions have appeared regularly in the *Club Notes*.

Based on these Committee decisions, the Ceylon Bird Club published the first complete official *List of Sri Lanka Bird Species* in February 1989 as a supplement to the *CBC Notes*. It was compiled by D. P. Wijesinghe, who is a member of the Rarities Committee. This was followed up in December 1994 by a fully updated version, including all newly accepted records, the *Checklist of the Birds of Sri Lanka*, also compiled by D. P. Wijesinghe.

This latest checklist includes all 425 species and also subspecies which have been reliably recorded in Sri Lanka, and is officially recognised by the Club. The recently completed revision to G. M. Henry's *Guide to the birds of Sri Lanka* is also based on the *Checklist*.

The present CBC Rarities Committee consists of six Sri Lankan and two overseas members who between them have expert and professional knowledge of the birds of the region.

Records which have been accepted following the publication of the 1994 *Checklist* are as follows:

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumani* 07/02/95, Palatupana, Yala

Subspecies of **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba leucopsis* 22/03/95, Kalametiya

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* 30/04/95, Debera Wewa, Tissamaharama

Ceylon Bird Club, P. O. Box 11, Colombo, Sri Lanka

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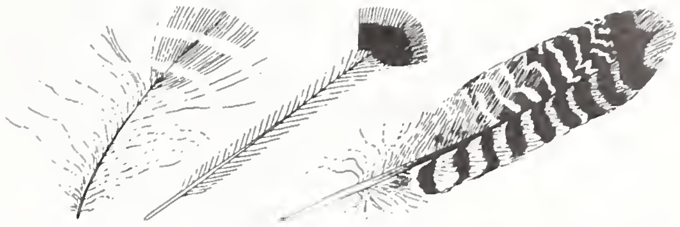
DELGRAPHICS

Stray Feathers



Photographs of Asian orioles

The Golden Oriole Study Group, based in Cambridgeshire, UK, is looking for photographs of other oriole species from around the world, especially photographs of Asian species. These photographs are to be used to illustrate posters and be used in slide shows. Anyone with suitable photographs who would like to allow their work to be used should contact Paul Mason, Chairman, Golden Oriole Group, Highfield House, Hillrow, Haddenham, Nr Ely, Cambs CB6 3TJ, UK.

GOLDEN ORIOLE GROUP

Forthcoming Sri Lankan field guide

A *Field guide to the birds of Sri Lanka* is currently under preparation, to be published by Oxford University Press in 1998. There will be colour illustrations of every species on the official Sri Lanka list. The text will be by John Harrison and the plates by Tim Worfolk. We are pleased to be able to reproduce one of the plates from this forthcoming guide on page 49.

Sri Lanka to host the Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress

It has been announced that Sri Lanka will be the venue for the Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress (PASOC) to be held in the year 2000.

Request for Sparrow observations in New Guinea

Although it is appreciated that club members visiting Papua New Guinea or Irian Jaya are not likely to be there to look for sparrows *Passer* sp., the Indonesian Ornithological Society would very much like it if those who are forced to spend a day in towns, either awaiting permits or flights to more exciting venues, would keep a look out for sparrows. House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* have colonised Port Moresby over the past two decades, whilst Tree Sparrows *P. montanus* have colonised Biak, first being sighted in 1989. However, in 1994 House Sparrows were sighted both on Biak and in Sorong. Subsequently there have been sightings of Tree Sparrows in Biak and on the south coast of Irian Jaya at Timika. Details of these sightings are given in *Kukila* 9 (1997).

Both species have clearly arrived with human assistance and indeed the Tree Sparrow has been spreading steadily eastwards through Indonesia. However, this is the first record of House Sparrow from Indonesia. It would appear that both species have succeeded in reaching Biak and it would be most interesting to document their competition in new colonisation. Any records should be sent to Derek Holmes, editor *Kukila*, the Bulletin of the Indonesian Ornithological Society.

India's first Birding Fair, Jaipur 1st-2nd February 1998

Birdwatchers visiting Rajasthan this winter will no doubt wish to visit India's first-ever Birding Fair, which will take place at Jal Mahal Lake near the pink city of Jaipur on 1st-2nd February 1998. This event, organised by WWF - India's Rajasthan State Committee, assisted by the Indian Army, the Department of Forestry and the Government of Rajasthan, is backed by expert NGOs and Travel Agencies.

The aim is to raise funds and awareness to help protect the important wetland of Jal Mahal Lake, an area which is under threat from encroachment and especially from pollution from effluent flowing into it from the city of Jaipur. At an educational fair, held last year on the same dates, to raise awareness from these threats, nearly 5,500 students, teachers and other interested parties took part. Two publications, one on the wetland itself and the other on the birds of the area, were specially produced.

It is particularly hoped that as many overseas visitors as possible will attend the fair and anybody visiting will contribute towards the protection of the wetland. Pre-fair and post-fair itineraries are also offered to cover specific interests with the opportunity to visit major national parks to observe birds and other wildlife in the area. The main promoter of this fair is Harsh Vardhan, the Hon. Secretary, Rajasthan WWF-India. Harsh has been heavily involved in the protection of the Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* in Rajasthan as well as in piloting work on the conservation of the Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* in India. He has written extensively on conservation in India and is a champion of involving the local community directly in the conservation of their area.

For further information, both about the Bird Fair and about the associated itineraries, please contact either Harsh Vardhan, C 158 A, Dayanand Marg, Tilak Nagar, Jaipur, India, fax: + 141 621129; or the OBC c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

Wild Asia

A ten-part television documentary series, *Wild Asia*, is currently being produced jointly by the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK TV) and Television New Zealand Natural History (TVNZ) for a worldwide audience.

Over the next three years, TVNZ and NHK are planning to film the most spectacular wildlife of Asia; from Arctic Siberia in the north to tropical Indonesia in the south, and from India in the west to Japan in the east. We are keen to contact naturalists, ornithologists and scientists who may have suggestions as to the most exciting stories of the region and perhaps can assist us in reaching spectacular locations and filming unique wildlife behaviour from Asia.

If you know of any suitable people, locations, organisations, or of fascinating animal or plant behaviour, please contact:

Dr Mark A. Brazil, Series Researcher, Wild Asia, TVNZ Natural History, P.O. Box 474, Dunedin, New Zealand.
Phone +64-3-479-9889. Fax +64-3-479-9917.
E-mail: mbrazil@tvnz.co.nz or MarkBrazil@compuserve.com

Going to India?

My friend Vijay Arora, 9/3 Pant Nagar, Jangpura, New Delhi-110 014, India, fax +91-11-4313623, has helped me with logistics most of the times I've been to India. Although he's not a birdwatcher, he knows all of the main sites in north-western India very well. Importantly, he's also extremely good at organising trips, so if you need any help with organisation, please get in contact with him.

Contributed by Per Alström, Sweden

Accommodation in the Kathmandu Valley

Birders visiting the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal can now stay on site at the best birding locality, without having to commute from Kathmandu. Mahendra Singh Limbu is happy to rent out two rooms with facilities (on a bed-and-breakfast basis) in his new house at Godavari, giving easy access to the key site of Phulchowki. OBC members who wish to take up this offer should write to him at: GPO Box 6941, Kathmandu, Nepal (Tel: 290562).

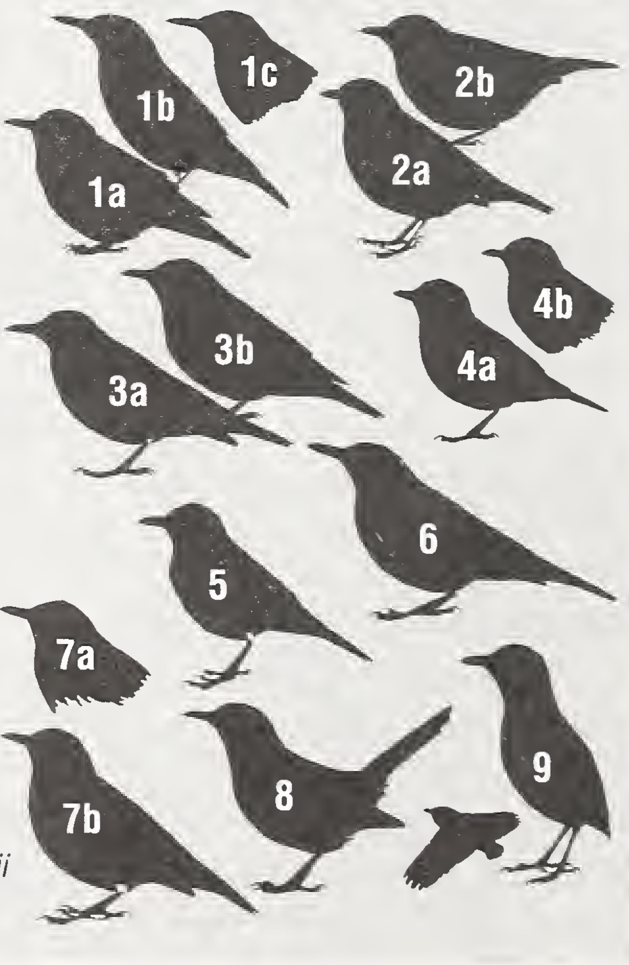


Plate from the forthcoming *Field guide to the birds of Sri Lanka* by John Harrison and Tim Worfolk.

We are grateful to Oxford University Press and Tim Worfolk for allowing us to reproduce this painting.

1: Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius pandoo* a) female, b) male winter, c) male spring

2: Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi* a) female, b) male

3: Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii* a) male, b) female

4: Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina* a) male, b) female

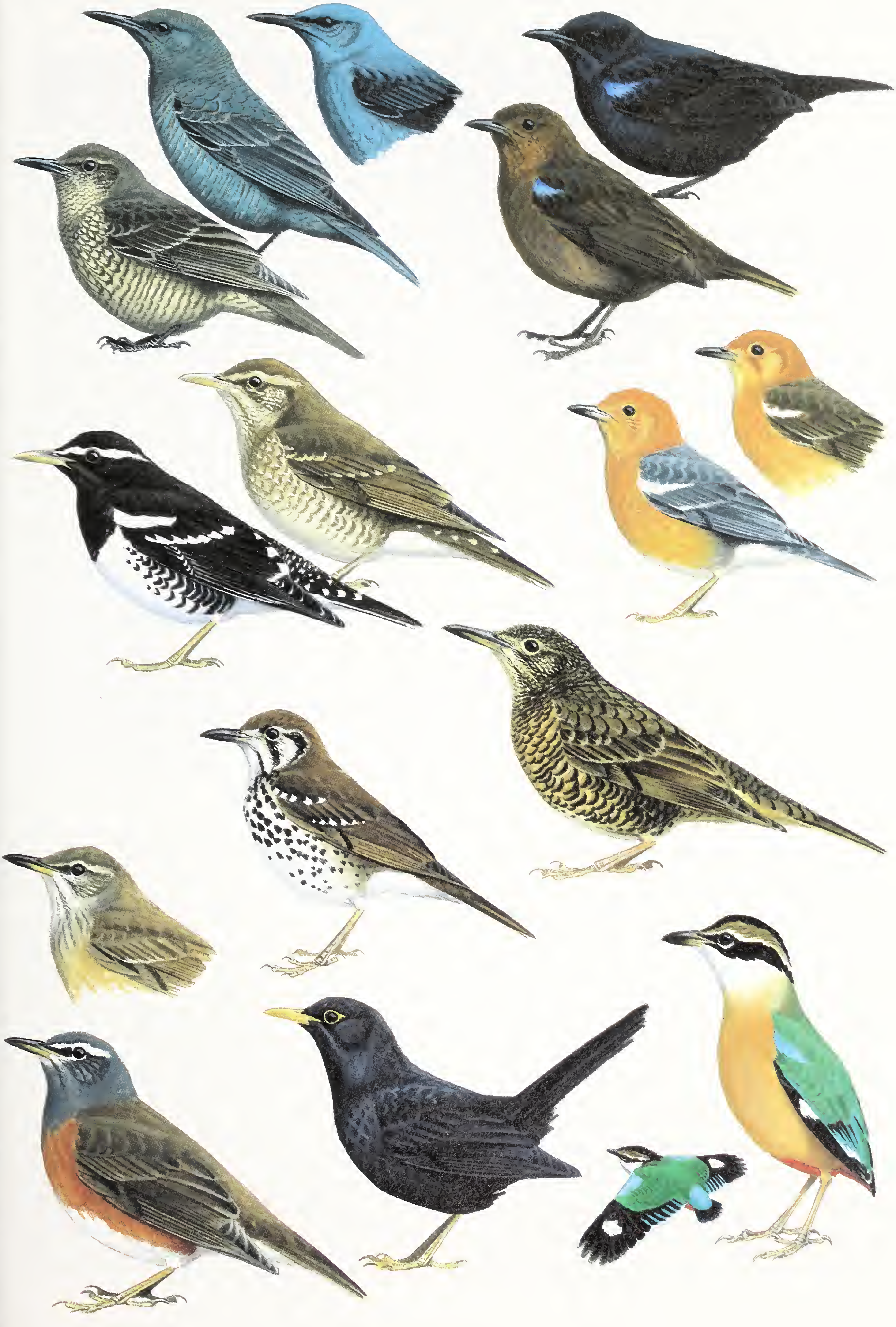
5: Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera*

6: Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma imbricata*

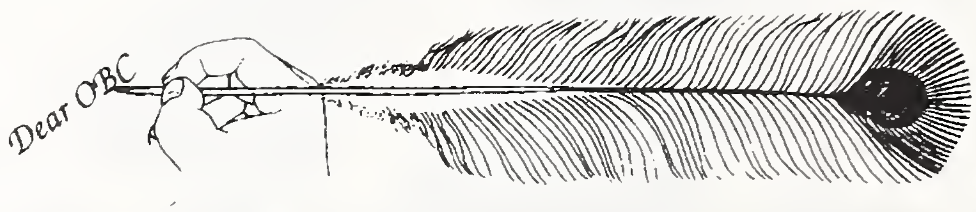
7: Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* a) first-winter female, b) male

8: Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula kinnisii*

9: Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*



To the Editor



Recent Sightings of the Black-capped Kingfisher in Sri Lanka

The Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata* is similar in size and shape to the very common and regionally widespread White-throated Kingfisher *H. smyrnensis*. However, in coloration, the Black-capped Kingfisher differs markedly from the familar White-throated Kingfisher. The former has a distinctive black cap separated from deep purplish-blue upperparts by a narrow white collar. The throat and upper breast are whitish grading into a rufous-buff belly. The bill and legs are a glowing bright red. In flight it displays prominent white wing-patches not unlike White-throated Kingfisher but the upperparts are a deeper, more vivid blue, contrasting with the white.

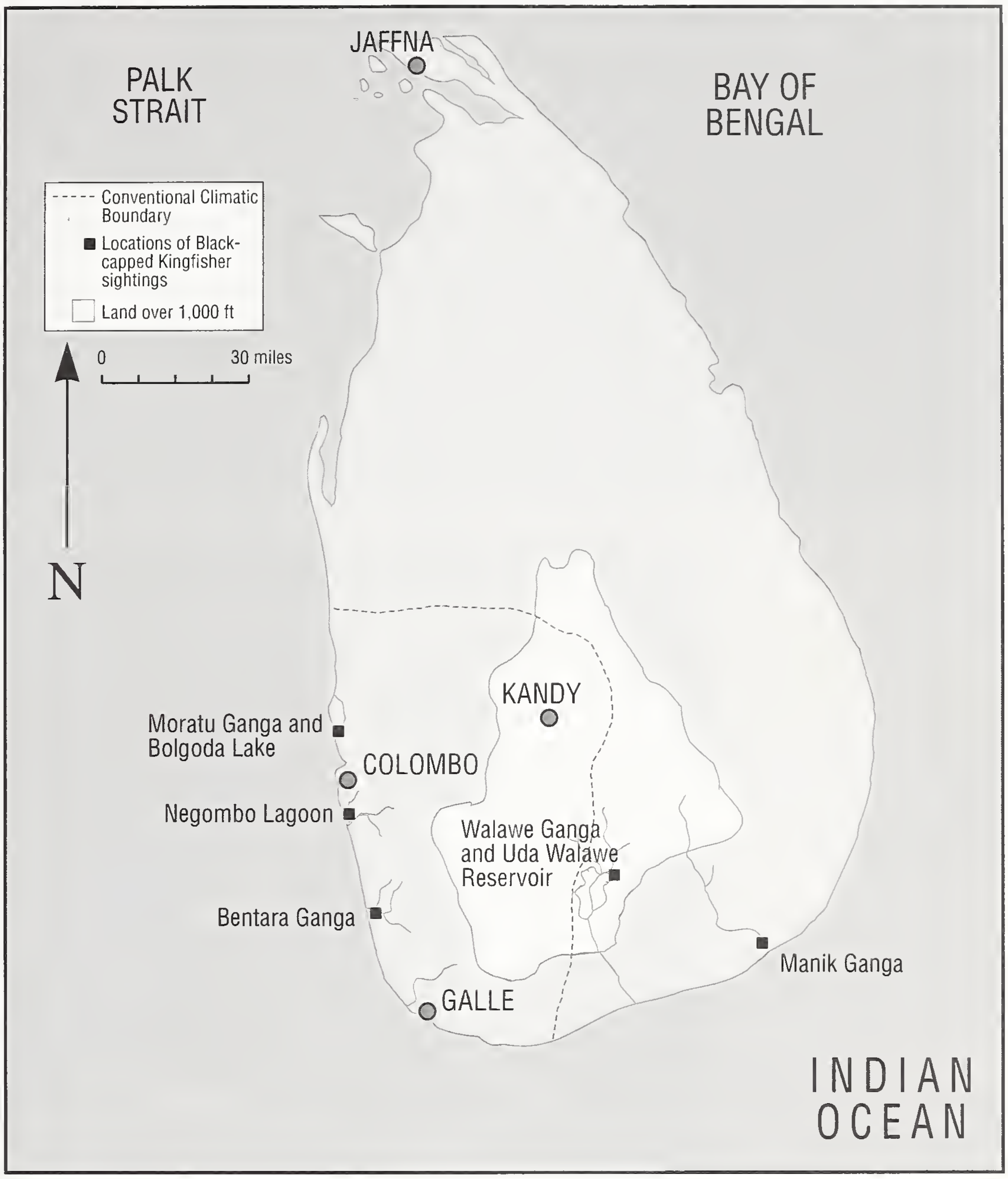
In Sri Lanka, Black-capped Kingfisher is known to be a very rare, winter migrant – that is until recent sightings brought into question this long-held belief. Captain Vincent Legge, who in 1880 was the foremost authority on the birds of the island, reported that it had been recorded only once from Ceylon. That was a specimen collected by his predecessor, Layard, in Jaffna in the far north of the island. G. M. Henry in 1955 said that the bird is a very rare visitor to Ceylon, 'only half a dozen or so of specimens having been recorded from the island'. Both Legge and Henry believe that the bird's stronghold is in Myanmar (Burma), especially in the extensive Irawaddy delta. It is common in Malaysia and spreads eastward into China.

The Black-capped Kingfisher is a common winter visitor and passage migrant in Thailand. It is found in Indonesia, especially the larger islands, and is reported from the Andamans and the Nicobar islands. The bird is believed to be a breeding resident in the Ganges delta and in far north-eastern India. Salim Ali says that, during the winter, it is found scattered along practically the entire coastline of India south of the latitude of Bombay.

During the northern winter of 1995/96 three Black-capped Kingfishers were reported, all from southern Sri Lanka. I saw one on several occasions in extensive mangroves in the estuary of the Bentota river, on the boundary of the Western and Southern Provinces of the island. Concurrently there was a bird in each of two southern national parks, Uda Walawe and Ruhuna or Yala. These birds were seen and photographed by some of the visitors to these parks. Once again in the winter of 1996/97, there were sightings of birds in Yala and Uda Walawe National Parks. In the Bentota river estuary I observed a Black-capped Kingfisher that was calling and I clearly heard its mate's answering call. During the same migration season a single bird was observed in Bolgoda, a freshwater lake close to Colombo with an opening to the sea that results in a seasonal brackish influx. I also observed a Black-capped Kingfisher along the mangrove-rich shoreline in the southern part of the Negombo lagoon 20 km north of Colombo. This represents a total of six birds in one season. All the birds, with the exception of the individual at Uda Walawe, frequented their preferred estuarine habitat or were close to such habitats, as in Yala. Uda Walawe is over 40 km from the nearest coast, and the bird frequented a small man-made reservoir.

One explanation offered for the sudden increase in sightings of Black-capped Kingfisher in Sri Lanka is the increase in birdwatching activity. However, I find it hard to accept this as the birds have been sighted in areas that are visited annually by competant birders and not in remote or newly populated areas. All the recent sightings of Black-capped Kingfishers come from just two of the country's nine provinces. (Three of the more suitable coastal provinces are war-torn and inaccessible.) Judging by the present sightings and the availability of suitable habitats in the north-west, north and east of the island, it would be safe to assume that the Black-capped Kingfisher is visiting the island in greater numbers than reported from just the south-west.

I believe that recent man-made changes in the coastal environment of peninsular India may result in the increased arrivals of the kingfisher in Sri Lanka, as brackish mangrove areas favoured by this species have in recent times been converted into prawn-farming ponds, especially in southern


JAFFNA
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BAY OF BENGAL
Conventional Climatic Boundary
Locations of Black-capped Kingfisher sightings
Land over 1,000 ft
0
30 miles
N
KANDY
Moratu Ganga and Bolgoda Lake
COLOMBO
Negombo Lagoon
Walawe Ganga and Uda Walawe Reservoir
Bentara Ganga
Manik Ganga
GALLE
INDIAN OCEAN

Figure 1: Location of Black-capped Kingfisher sightings in Sri Lanka

India. Increasing population pressure is also having a drastic impact on mangrove communities in India (firewood gathering and filling of marshy land for housing). It is my belief that, as winter migrants from South-East Asia such as the Black-capped Kingfisher find suitable habitats and food sources dwindling in southern India they continue flying further south down the east coast of India and into Sri Lanka. Once in Sri Lanka, given the relatively small size of the island, the kingfishers spread out through the coastal districts and take up residence for the winter in suitable habitats.

The long-term conservation of the Black-capped Kingfisher may be linked to the study of these increasing sightings in Sri Lanka and there is an urgent need to gather more data. I sincerely hope that an interested ornithologist or organisation will take up this task. It is all the more important as some of the most suitable brackish-water habitats and mangrove communities in western Sri Lanka have already been obliterated by haphazard prawn farming, and other such areas are under the constant threat of short-sighted development and population pressure. The Black-capped Kingfisher's discovery of Sri Lanka could still prove to be its Indian summer.

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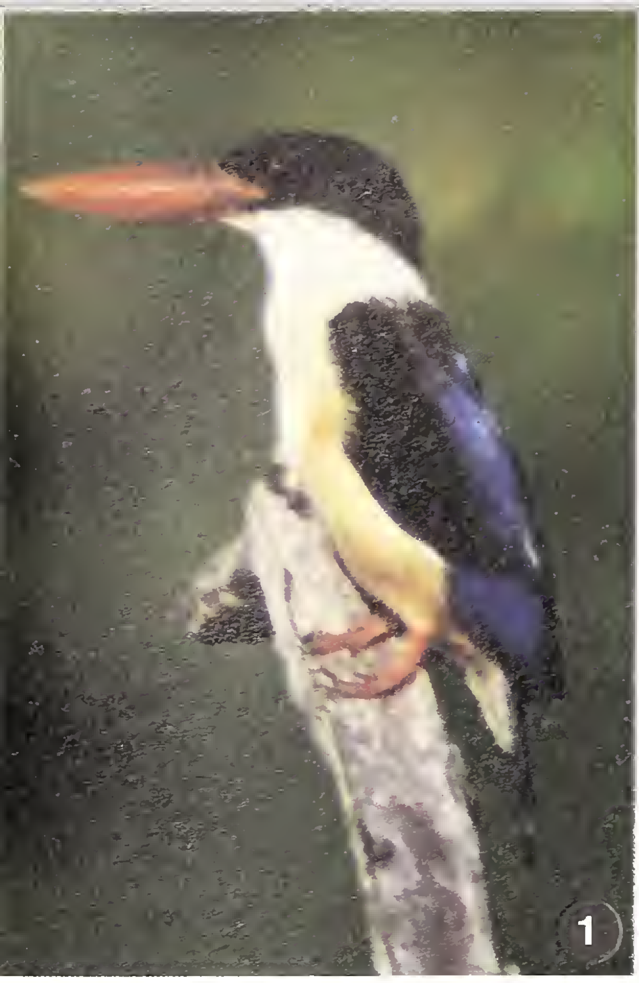
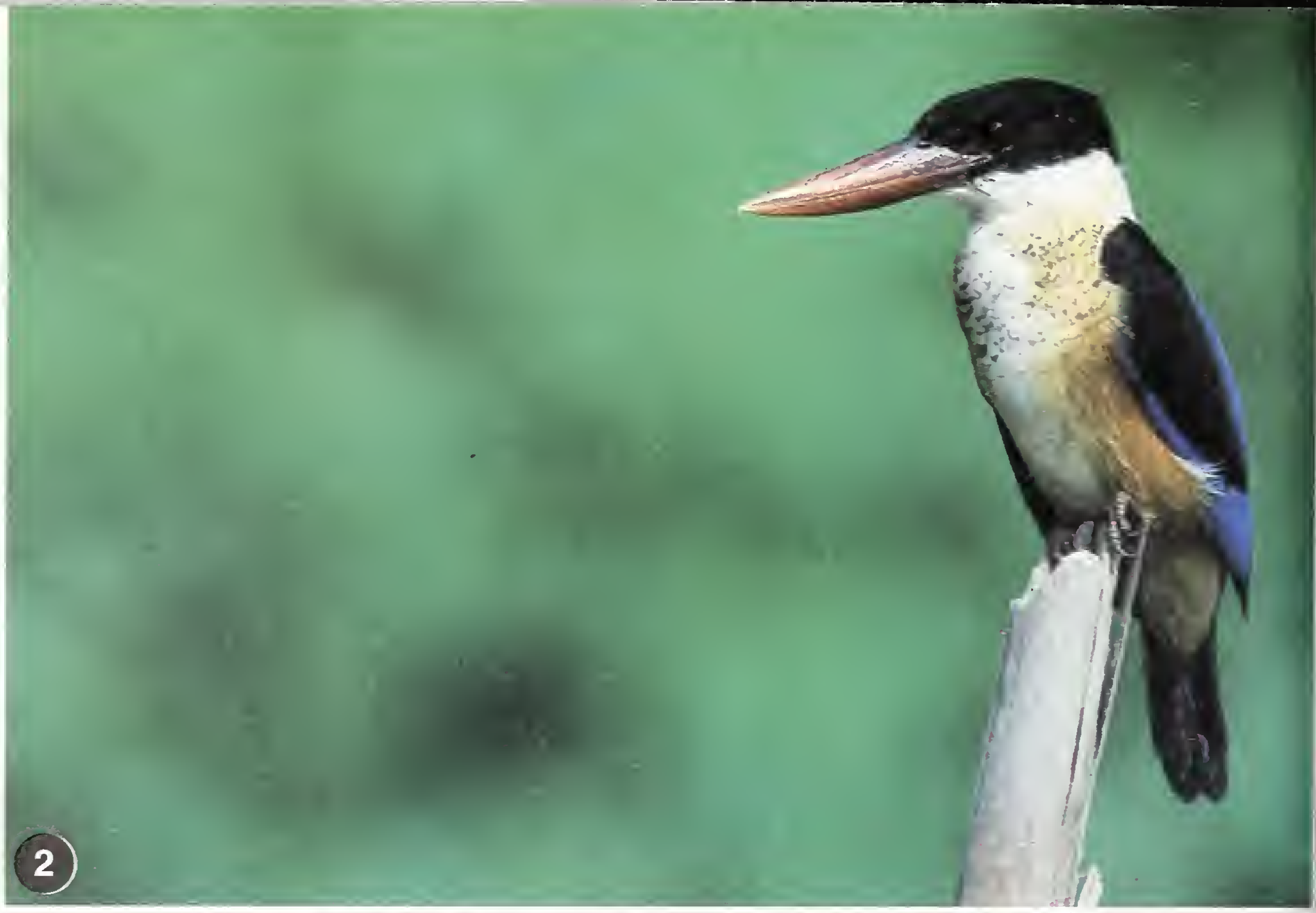
Rukshana Jayewardene



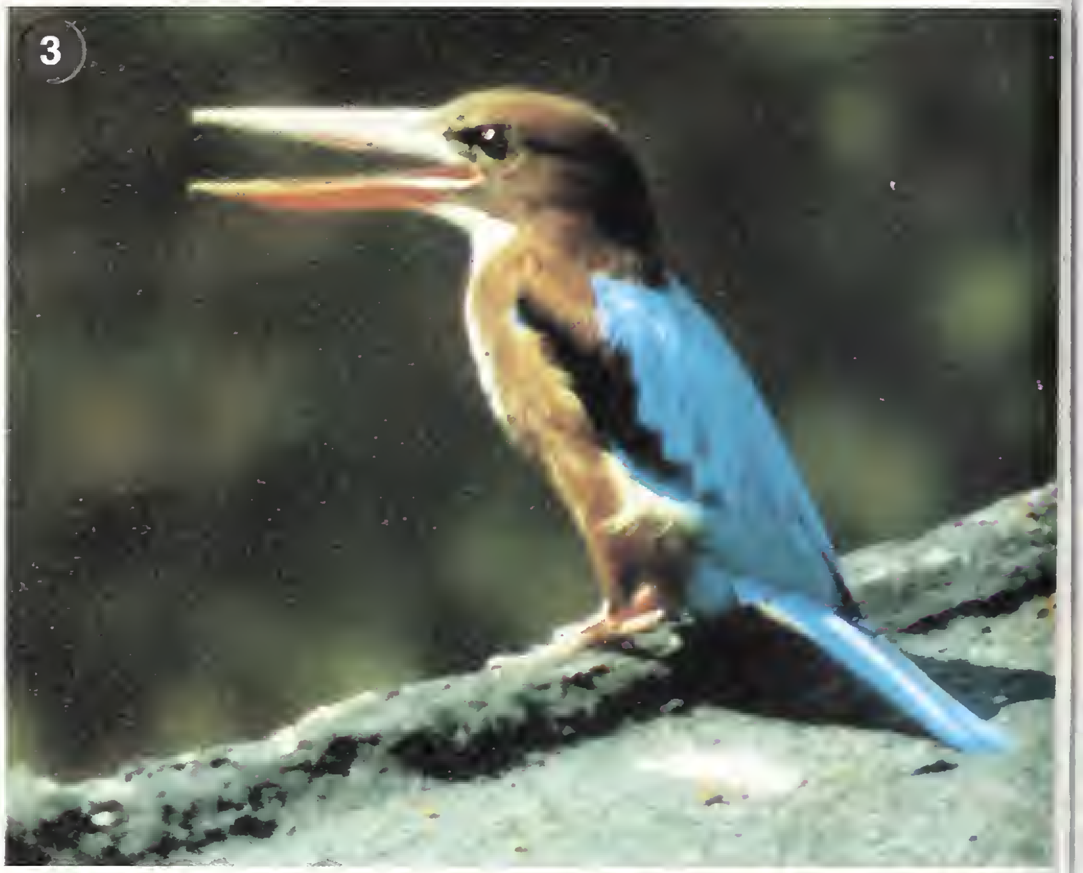


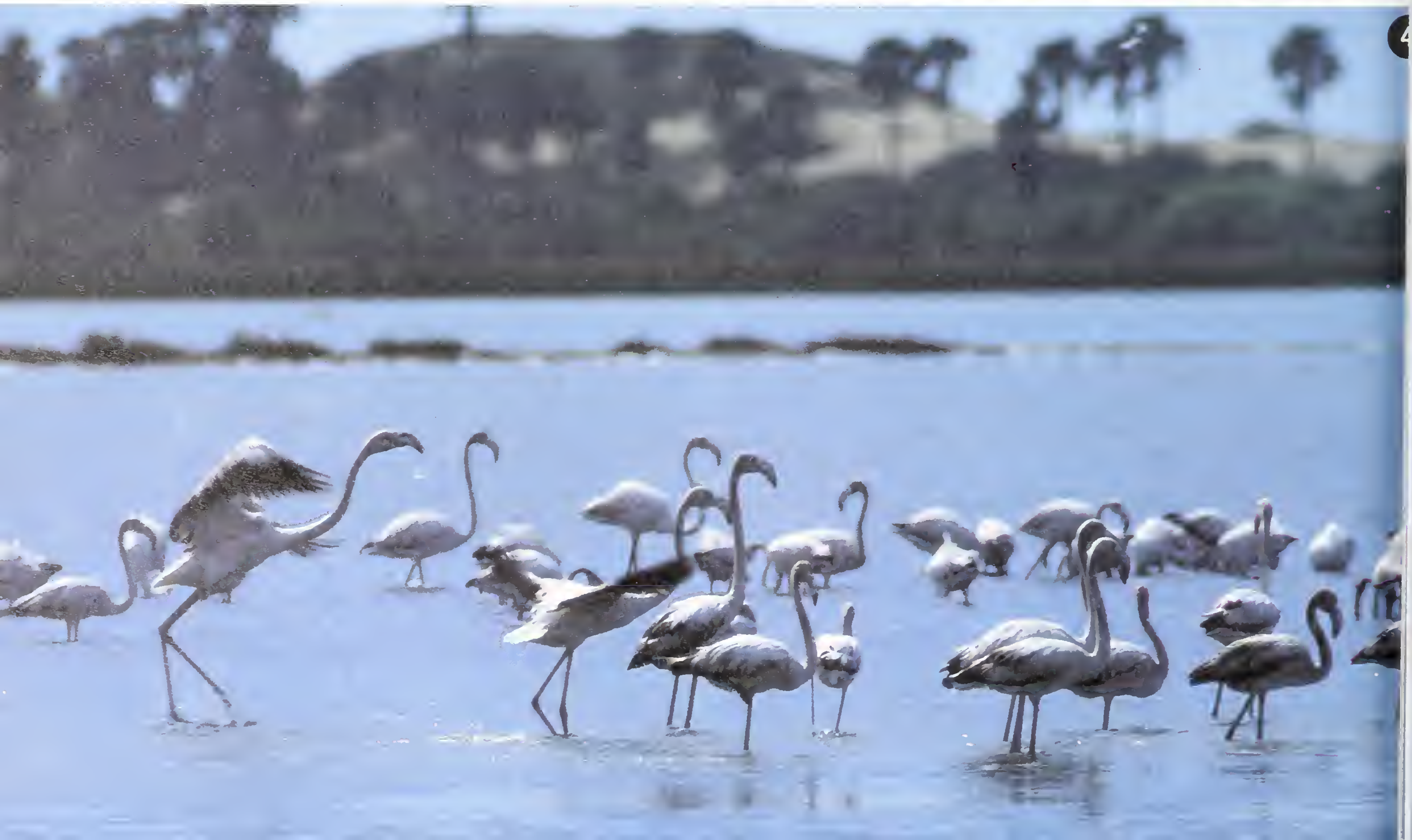
1: Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata* (Photo: Ravi Jayewardene).

2: Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata* (Photo: Ray Tipper).

3: White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* (Photo: Aruna Kirtisinghe).

4: Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* (Photo: Gehan de Silva).





Greater Flamingos at Bundala, Sri Lanka

Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* are regular winter migrants to Sri Lanka and constitute a considerable attraction even to those largely not involved with the birdlife of the country. Flocks of a thousand or more birds are observed regularly overwintering in lagoons in the Northern, Eastern and Southern Provinces. They are regularly reported each year in and around Bundala National Park, which is located close to the town of Hambantota on the south coast.

There has been considerable interest over the years as to whether the flamingo does, in fact, breed in Sri Lanka. Henry,[1] for instance, noted that a number oversummer and there was speculation that some birds may have bred on remote lagoons in the Eastern Province. The discussion has continued into more recent times.[2-4] Possible breeding was reported by a Range Assistant at Bundala who claimed to observe a party of 75-90 juveniles which he considered to be less than a month old. The Editor of *Loris*, the journal of the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society of Sri Lanka, in a footnote to an article also made reference to unconfirmed reports of nesting colonies at Kokkilai lagoon in the north-east of the country. However, nests with eggs (or even eggshells) have yet to be confirmed.

Earlier this year there was considerable interest aroused when a Sunday newspaper published a photograph taken by Nihal Fernando of around 635 flamingo nest-mounds at Bundala. They were photographed in early May; however, birders who subsequently visited the locality were disappointed to find that the birds had already abandoned the site.

Differences of opinion are expressed as to the significance of these mounds as regards an attempt at breeding. No eggs or eggshells were found and some are of the view that this may have been merely a 'practice' exercise prior to their return to breeding grounds in the Rann of Kutch or elsewhere overseas.[5] It is known that such trial nest-building may occur in locations other than at the ultimate nesting site.[6] However, it is also known that flamingos are opportunistic in their breeding behaviour and McCann[7] speculated that, under stress caused by certain hydrographic conditions, breeding populations may move from one to the other of the major nesting sites in Europe, Africa and Asia. Excessive disturbance may also affect breeding and movements[6] and it is not inconceivable that the military activity taking place in parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces is, on occasion, displacing flamingo populations to the south.

It is ironic that this report of several hundred flamingo nesting-mounds being observed at Bundala comes at this point in time. In a move to increase employment opportunities, a development programme for the south is presently being drawn up and implemented. One item in this programme is the establishment of a 200,000 barrel-per-day oil refinery close to Bundala (*OBC Bull.* 24: 19). Crude oil will be brought in by tanker and transferred by pipeline to land and the refined products transferred by pipeline to tankers for export. Any oil pollution due to these operations may adversely affect the feeding grounds of the flamingos at Bundala. Among the other development projects being contemplated for the south is an airport which may be sited about 30 km from Bundala and which may conceivably affect any attempts by flamingos at breeding at a future date.

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6 Cramp, S. and Simmons, K. E. L. (Eds.) (1977) *Birds of the western Palearctic,* 1. Oxford University Press, London.
7 McCann, C. (1939) The flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber antiquorum* Temminck). *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 41: 12-38.

Free Press

Compiled by James C. Lowen

This feature aims to publicise papers and reports of interest to members. If anyone has written or knows of recent publications worthy of inclusion in this feature, please send details to the OBC for future bulletins.

REGIONAL

The Bjorkegren expeditions to the French Indochina: a collection of birds from Vietnam and Cambodia *by J. Eames (BirdLife Vietnam Prog., 17M 13 Lang Trung, Dong Da, Hanoi, Vietnam) and P. G. P. Ericson.* **Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc. 44: 75-111**. Collections from 1930s, including type of Grey-crowned Crocias *Crocias langbianis*, now in Stockholm.

Importance of tactile and visual stimuli of eggs and nest for termination of egg laying of Red Junglefowl *by T. Meijer (Dept. Ethology, Univ. Bielefeld, PO Box 100131, 33501 Bielefeld, Germany).* **Auk 112: 483-488**. Surprisingly, *Gallus gallus* does not use visual stimuli.

An observation of foot-trembling in a Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* *by J. Starks (21 Valewood Dr., Wyndhamvale, Victoria 3030, Australia).* **Stilt 28: 47**. May improve foraging proficiency.

Deforestation predicts the number of threatened birds in insular southeast Asia *by T. M. Brooks (Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, 569 Dabney Hall, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-1610, USA) et al.* **Cons. Biol. 11: 382-394**. Estimation of size of the extinction crisis.

CHINA

Large numbers of Relict Gulls breeding on Happy Island, China, in August-September 1994 *by F. Heintzenberg (Claudiusring 10g, 23466 Lubeck, Germany) and J. Dierschke.* **Dutch Birding 18: 59-63**. Up to 865 *Larus relictus* (and 68 Saunders's Gull *L. saundersi*).

Relict Gull numbers at Beidahe, China, in autumn 1992 *by C. G. Bradshaw (6 Collet Walk, Parkwood, Gillingham ME8 9QL, UK) and A. Rowlands.* **Dutch Birding 18: 248**. Up to 15 first-winter *Larus relictus*.

The status of Saunders's Gulls on the east coast of China *by Wang Hai (Yancheng National Nature Reserve, Xinyanggang, Yancheng, Jiangsu 224333, China) and Sai Dao Jian.* **Hong Kong Bird Report 1995: 245-249**. 500 pairs and 1,100 juveniles of *Larus saundersi* at Yancheng Nature Reserve in 1994.

Harmani Eared-pheasant under the umbrella of Tibetan religion *by L. Xin (no address).* **WPA News 52: 11-12.** Population protected and easily studied in grounds of Buddhist nunnery.

Ecology and behaviour of the Chinese Grouse *by S. Klaus (no address) et al.* **Der Ornithologische Beobachter 93: 343-365** and **Grouse News 13: 20-21**. Display, habitat, status and evolution of this threatened endemic.

Breeding ecology of the White Eared Pheasant (*Crossoptilon crossoptilon*) in western Sichuan, China *by W. Yi (Sichuan Teachers' College, Nanchong, Sichuan, China) and P. Jitai.* **J. Yamashina Inst. Ornithol. 28: 98-102**. Habitat, parental roles, fledging success, predation.

Radio-tracking study of habitat selection and movement of the Cabot's Tragopan *by R. Sumner (WPA-USA, 1800 S. Canyon Park Circle, Suite 402, Edmond, OK 73013-6613, USA) and Zheng Guangmai.* **Game Bird and Conserv. Gaz. December 1996: 37-38.** Seasonal variation in habitat use.

[New record of Indicatoridae.] *by L. Yang (Kunming Inst. Zool., Academica Sinica, Kunming 650223, Yunnan, China).* (Chinese, Engl. summ.). **Zool. Res. Kunming 16: 384**. *Indicator archipelagicus* new to China.

[The ecology and status of the Hainan subspecies of Silver Pheasant] *by Y. Gao (S. China Inst. Endangered Anim., Guangzhou 510260, China) and D. Yu.* **Zool. Res. Kunming 16: 353-358**. (Chinese, English summary.) Population density of *Lophura nycthemera whiteheadi* halved, 1987-1992.

Forest birds of south-east China: observations during 1984-1996 *by R. Lewthwaite 2 Villa Paloma, Shuen Wan, Tai Po, Hong Kong.* **Hong Kong Bird Rep. 1995: 150-203**. 322 species, including 18 threatened/near-threatened.

The status and trade of edible-nest swiftlets genus *Collocalia* in China *by Zhiyong Fan (CITES Management Authority of China, Ministry of Forestry, Hepingli, Beijing 100714, China) and Fenqui He.* **Tigerpaper 24: 31-32**. A summary of the scant nest-harvesting data for three swiftlet species in China.

Breeding ecology of Styan's Bulbul *Pycnonotus taivanus* in Taiwan *by Minna Hsu (Dept. of Biology, National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung 80424, Taiwan, Republic of China) and Yao-Sung Lin.* **Ibis 139: 518-522**. Clutch size, hatching success and nest location of this Taiwanese endemic.

INDIA

The recent distribution of endemic and disjunct birds in Kerala state: preliminary results of an ongoing survey *by A. J. Gaston (Canadian Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Research Centre, 100 Gamelin Blvd., Hull, Quebec, Canada K1A 0H3) and V. J. Zacharias.* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 389-400.** Threatened species and conservation priorities in the forests of the Western Ghats.

Aerial display in the Lesser Florican *by R. Sankaran. J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 401-410.* Display pattern correlates to site-fidelity, weather, height of grass and display-rate.

Strategies for long-term conservation of the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* in India *by A. R. Rahmani (Centre of Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002, India).* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 442-458**. Detailed measures to offset ineffective habitat protection and extensive poaching.

Distribution, status and conservation of Indian heronries *by S. Subramanya PHT Scheme 'J' Block, G.K.V.K. Campus, Uni. of Agri. Sci., Bangalore 560065.* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 459-486**. Few of the 500 sites (with 26 nesting species) are protected.

A review of the birds of the Thattakad Bird Sanctuary, Kerala *by R. Sugathan and A. P. Varghese (Salim Ali Wild Wings Trust, Zoological Research Station, Thattakad Bird Sanctuary, Njayapitty, Kerala, India).* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 487-506**. Notes on 270 species.

Effect of climate on Palaearctic warblers over-wintering in India *by M. Katti and T. Price (Dept. of Biology, 0116, Univ. of California at San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0116, USA).* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 411-427**. Long-term variation in rainfall causes population fluctuations.

Nest-site characteristics and nesting success of the Malabar Gray Hornbill in the Southern Western Ghats, India *by D. C. Mudappa and R. Kannan (Dept Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, USA).* **Wilson Bull. 109: 102-111**. Characterisation of the nesting habitat of Malabar Grey Hornbills *Ocyceros griseus* in the Anaimalai Hills of the southern Western Ghats, India.

Avifauna of the Eastern Ghats with special reference to the Jerdon's Courser *Cursorius bitorquatus* *by J. S. Samant (no address) and V. Elangovan.* Five nocturnal records at Sri Lankamaleswara Wildlife Sanctuary in 1994-5. Published by Bombay Natural History Society.

New localities for Blyth's Tragopan from Nagaland, India *by A. Choudhury (Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India, c/o The Assam Co. Ltd, G. Bordoloi Path, Bamnunimaidam, Guwahati 781021, Assam, India).* **WPA News 52: 13-15** and **Tragopan 6: 11-12**. *Tragopan blythii* now known to occur in four of Nagaland's seven districts.

Checklist of the birds of the Delhi region: an update *by S. Vyas (High Commission of India, Dar-Es-Salaam, c/o Ministry of External Affairs, South Block, New Delhi-110 011, India).* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 219-237**. Six new species since 1986, and declines for several waterfowl, raptors and passerines.

Grey Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* - overview of an endangered bird *by S. Riyazuddin (15/296 Bandlamitta St., Cuddapah 516001, Andhra Pradesh, India).* **Mayura 11: 39-44**. Charts the decline of this threatened species.

Surveys of Andaman teal in winter 1995/6 *by L. Vijayan and R. Sakthivel (Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Kalampalayan PO, Coimbatore 641010, India)* **TWSG News 9:25-27**. New sites increase world population estimate to 500.

Satyr Tragopan in the Singhalila National Park, Darjeeling, India *by S. Khaling (Centre of Wildlife and Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh – 202002, India).* **Tragopan 6: 13-14**. *Tragopan satyra*: population, ecology and threats.

Birds of Corbett Tiger Reserve and its environs *by B. Grewal (101/4, Kaushalaya Park, Hauz Khas, New Delhi - 110 016, India; email bikram.gmpltd@axcess.net.in) and B. Sahgal.* 23-page checklist of 500 species, with details on reserve access and history.

Territorial displays of the Bengal Florican *by R. Sankaran (Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Kalampalayan PO, Coimbatore 641010, India).* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 167-177**. *Houbaropsis bengalensis* has two forms of display; both can be triggered by calls of unrelated species.

A catalogue of the birds in the collection of Bombay Natural History Society - 37: Dicaeidae, Nectariniidae and Zosteropidae *by H. Abdulali (no address) and S. Unnithan.* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 92: 242-251**. 666 specimens of 44 species.

Saving the Spot-billed Pelican: a successful experiment *by S. Subramanya (current address BirdLife International, Welbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA) and K. Manu.* **Hornbill 1996: 2-7**. 21 abandoned nestlings rejoined wild population after being reared in nursery.

Belikere Lake - a new foraging site for Spotbilled Pelicans (*Pelecanus philippensis*) *by M. V. Rama (2821, 9th Cross, VV Mohala, Mysore 570002, India).* **Newsl. Birdwatchers 36: 110-111**. Up to 90 birds near Mysore.

Field observations of the White-winged Wood Duck *by A. Choudhury (nr Gate no. 1 of Nehru Stadium, Islampur Rd, Guwahati 781007, Assam, India; but also see above).* **Newsl. Birdwatchers 36: 85-86**. Ecological notes on *Cairina scutulata* from Assam in 1993.

Distribution and abundance patterns of bird community and raptor populations in the Andaman Archipelago *by J.-M. Thiollay (Lab. d'Ecologie, ENS, rue d'Ulm, F-75230 Paris Cedex 05, France).* **Ecogeography 20: 67-82**. Island area is main determinant of species richness in all habitats.

INDONESIA

Ducklings of White-winged Duck in Indonesia *by Tulus Sibuea (Wetlands International Indonesia Programme, PO Box 254/Boo, Bogor 16002, Indonesia).* **TWSG News 9: 24**. A breeding record of *Cairina scutulata* from Berbak National Park, Sumatra.

Notes on the breeding of the Crested Jay *Platylophus galericulatus* *by S. van Balen (BirdLife International-Indonesia Programme, PO Box 310/Boo, Bogor 16003, Indonesia) and V. Nijman.* **Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 116: 173-174**. Nest details from central Java.

Distributional patterns in west Wallacea and their relationship to regional tectonic structures *by B. Michaux (no address).* **Sarawak Mus. J. 48: 163-179**. Includes assessment of 169 bird species.

The report of the ornithological expedition to the Rawa Aopa Watumohai National Park, south-east Sulawesi, Indonesia *by J. C. Wardhill (27 Carlton Avenue, Hornsea HU18 1JG, UK).* Non-serial report: first park surveys produced 154 species.

Results of the 1996 bird survey of Buton Island, Sulawesi, Indonesia *by M. Caterall (Ecosurveys Ltd, Priory Lodge, Hagnaby, Spilsby PE23 4BP, UK).* Non-serial report: Operation Wallacea produced surprising, albeit undocumented, findings.

Biological surveys and conservation priorities in north-east Seram, Maluku, Indonesia *by I. S. Isherwood (Broombank, Sandside, Kirkby-in-Furness LA17 7UA, UK) et al.* Important populations of Salmon-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua moluccensis* and

Purple-naped Lory *Lorius domicella*. (CSB Conservation Publications, ISBN 1 901399 02 8).

Sexual dimorphism in the Javan Hawk-eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi* *by V. Nijman and R. Soezer (Institute of Systematics and Population Biology, Univ. of Amsterdam, PO Box 94766, 1090 GT Amsterdam, Netherlands).* **Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 116: 251-253.** Sexes differ in ratios of lengths of hind claw to bill and of tail to wing.

Mountain Eared Nightjar in Arfak Mountains, Irian Jaya: range extension and first description of nest and egg *by D. Gibbs (28 Blackamoor Lane, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8RD, UK).* **Dutch Birding 18: 246-247.** 600 km west of known range; first photographs.

Wildlife Conservation Society surveys for Bornean Peacock-pheasant *by T. O'Brien and M. F. Kinnaird (Wildlife Cons. Soc. – Indonesia Program, PO Box 311, Jl. Ciremei No. 8, Bogor 16003, Indonesia).* **Tragopan 6: 5-6.** Local reports suggest *Polyplectron schleiermacheri* may be more widespread than thought.

Impact of logging and plantation development on species diversity: a case study from Sumatra *by F. Danielsen and M. Heegaard* in *Management of tropical forests: towards an integrated perspective*, ed. O. Sandbukt (1995), Oslo: Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo. The composition of animal communities 7-10 years after logging is described.

JAPAN

[Status of Japanese Murrelets *Synthliboramphus wumizusume* at Oonohara-jima, Miyake-jima, central Japan] *by Yutaka Kobayashi (Miyake-jima Nature Center Akakokko Station, Wild Bird Society of Japan, 4188 Tsubota, Miyake-mura, Miyake-jima, Tokyo 100-12, Japan) et al.* **Strix 15: 109-115.** (Japanese, Engl. summ.) Census revealed 200 birds and three nests.

[Decrease of Japanese Murrelets in Izu Islands, central Japan] *by H. Mochizuki (Sasikiji, Oshimamachi, Tokyo 100-02, Japan) and M. Ueta.* **Strix 14: 173-176.** (Japanese, Engl. summ.) *Synthliboramphus wumizusume* has declined significantly in two areas.

[First breeding record of Honey Buzzards in Fukai] *by Y. Ikeda et al. (Nihkonkai Working Group on Birds of Prey, 3-21, Yokaichi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 921, Japan).* **Strix 14: 194-196.** (Japanese, Engl. summ.). *Pernis apivorus* in Japan.

[A record of Black-faced Spoonbill display behaviour in Ishikawa Prefecture] *by Hisayuki Daimon (1-63-5 Minato Town, Nanao City, Ishikawa Prefecture, 926, Japan).* **Strix 15: 138-140.** (Japanese, Engl. summ.). Displaying pair of *Platalea minor* in heronry.

[A population estimate of the endangered Amami Thrush made by counting singing birds] *by Amami Ornithologists' Club (Furuta-machi 8-10, Naze, Kagoshima 894, Japan).* **Strix 15: 117-120.** (Japanese, Engl. summ.) Just 30 pairs on Amami in southern Japan.

[Habitat structure of Red-crowned Cranes in eastern Hokkaido] *by Miho Morita (Research Center, Wild Bird Society of Japan, 15-8 Nanpeidai, Shibuya, Tokyo 150, Japan).* **Strix 15:75-81.** (Japanese, Engl. summ.) Habitat preference and home range of four pairs.

[Present status of the Japanese Marsh Warbler (*Megalurus pryeri*) and its conservation] *by H. Nagata (Lab. of Wildlife Cons., Nat. Institute for Env. Studies, Onogawa 16-2, Tsukuba, Ibarakai, 305 Japan).* **Strix 29: 27-42.** (Japanese, Engl. sum.) 1,000 birds at seven sites, with only three stable populations.

[Observations of Saunders' Gull in Japan] *by M. Takeshite (3-13-11 Dairitonoue, Moji-ku, Kitakyushu-shi, Fukuoka 800, Japan).* **Strix 14: 182-185.** (Japanese, Engl. summ.) 12 wintering sites for *Larus saundersi*, including two with more than 200 birds.

LAOS

Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* in Laos *by T. D. Evans (11a Yeoman Lane, Bearsted, Maidstone, ME14 4BX, UK).* **Tragopan 6: 9-10.** Now on the brink of national extinction.

The White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* in Laos *by T. D. Evans (see above) et al.* **WWT Wildfowl 47: 81-96.** Tiny numbers at scattered localities in two regions.

MALAYSIA

On the distribution and status of the Chestnut-necklaced Partridge in Malaysia *by D. Yong (Kingfisher Tours Sdn Bhd, Suite 1107, 11th floor Bangunan Yayasan Selangor, Jln Bukit Bintang, 55100 K. Lumpur, Malaysia).* **Suara Enggang July-August 1997: 23-25.** *Arborophila c. charltonii* is now very scarce; *A. c. graydoni* remains locally common.

MONGOLIA

Baikal Teal in Hovsgol, northern Mongolia *by Martin Harper (36 Hollingbourne Road, Herne Hill, London SE24 9ND).* **TWSG News 9: 27-29.** Two non-breeding records of *Anas formosa* in the recently declared Hovsgol National Park.

[Ornithological observations from south-west Mongolia] *by C. Tourenq (Institut de Recherches sur les Grands Mammiferes, INRA, CRA Toulouse, BP 27, F-31326 Castanet Tolosan Cedex, France) et al.* **Alauda 64: 405-412.** (French, Engl. summ.) Five species new to south-west Mongolia.

MYANMAR

White-winged Duck in Thamanthi wildlife sanctuary, Myanmar *by Saw Han (Wildlife and Sanctuaries Directorate, D-35, Kyaik Waing Pagoda Rd, Mayangon P.O. 11062, Yangon, Myanmar).* **TWSG News 9: 22-23.** First breeding (and third record) of *Cairina scutulata.*

PAKISTAN

Twentieth-century changes in the avifauna of Pakistan *by T. J. Roberts (Cae Gors, Rhoscefnhir, Anglesey, Gwynedd LL75 8YU, UK).* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 374-381.** Changes due to increasing human activity.

PHILIPPINES

Species survival versus perpetuation of myth – the case of the Philippine Eagle *by N. J. Collar (BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA).* **Newsletter of the World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls 23/24: 23-26.** Population underestimation has directed conservation effort (unjustifiably) towards *ex-situ* conservation.

Effect of climate on the distribution of the Philippine Eagle (*Pithecophaga jefferyi* Ogilvie Grant) *by P. L. Alviola III (Wildlife Biology Lab., Institute of Biological Sciences, UPLB, College 4031, Laguna, Luzon, Philippines).* **Sylvatrop 5: 44-8.** Rainfall seasonality purported to influence species's distribution.

New *Aethopyga* sunbirds (Aves: Nectariniidae) from the island of Mindanao, Philippines *by R. S. Kennedy et al. (Mus. of Nat. Hist., Cincinnati Museum Center, 1720 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45202, USA).* **Auk 114: 1-10.** Lina's Sunbird *A. linaraborae* and race of Apo Sunbird *A. boltoni tibolii* described.

A small collection of birds from the Philippines with notes on body mass, distribution, and habitat *by J. Erritzoe (Taps Old Rectory, DK-6070, Christiansfeld, Denmark).* **Nemouria 40: 1-15.** 199 individuals of 84 species.

The Philippine Eagle on its hundredth birthday *by N. J. Collar (BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK).* **The Raptor 24: 29-31.** *Pithecophaga jefferyi*: synopsis of status, threats and recommendations.

Phylogenetic placement of *Mimizuku gurneyi* (Aves: Strigidae) inferred from mitochondrial DNA *by H. C. Miranda, Jr. (Dept. of Biological Sciences, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio 54221, USA) et al.* **Auk 114: 315-323.** The Giant Scops-owl has closer affinities to the genus *Otus* than to *Bubo.*

Twenty-nine new island records of birds from the Philippines *by T. Brooks and G. Dutson.* **Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 117: 32-37.** Includes Philippine Eagle-owl *Bubo philippensis* and Celestial Monarch *Hypothymis coelestis.*

SOUTH KOREA

Baikal Teal in South Korea *by N. C. Moores (Maison Torianon 101, Kashii 6-chome, 3-27 Higashi-ku, Fukuoka, Japan).* **Hong Kong Bird Report 1995: 231-235**. Around 80,000 *Anas formosa* winter in South Korea.

SRI LANKA

New bird records in Sri Lanka and some connected matters *by T. W. Hoffman (Ceylon Bird Club, PO Box 11, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka).* **J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 93: 382-388**. 19 new species and notes on Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*.

THAILAND

Thailand's expanding Green Peafowl population *by B. Stewart-Cox (no address).* **Bird Cons. Soc. Thailand Bull. 14(2): 14.** 300 birds (and rising) at Hwai Khae Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary.

VIETNAM

Observations on the nesting behaviour of the Bar-bellied Pitta *Pitta elliotii* *by J. C. Eames (address above).* **Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 116: 216-224.** Many aspects of nesting biology.

The conservation and captive management of Crested Argus *Rheinartia ocellata* and Edwards' Pheasant *Lophura edwardsi* in Vietnam: should reintroduction be considered? *by J. C. Eames (address above)* **Tragopan 4: 6-8.** Not as an alternative to protecting wild populations.

Plumage variation in Vietnamese and Edwards' Pheasants *by J. Corder (9 Woodmere Avenue, Shirley, Croydon CR0 7PG, UK).* **Tragopan 4: 10-11**. Distinguishing *Lophura hatinhensis* and *L. edwardsi*, and variation in female of former.

Observations and findings about the Vietnamese Pheasant *Lophura hatinhensis* at the Hanoi Zoological Gardens *by D. G. Tung and L. S. Thuc (Hanoi Zoological Gardens, Hanoi, Vietnam).* **Tragopan 4: 8-9.** More on plumage and morphological differences from *L. edwardsi*.

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From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from March 1996 to August 1997. We urge that if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

BHUTAN

Two new species for the country were seen at Sandrup Jongkhar **Dark-rumped Swift** *Apus acuticauda* in spring 1996 and spring 1997 (BKi/Kingbird) and **Oriental Hobby** *Falco severus* in spring 1996 (BKi/Kingbird). Both species were also observed there on 24 April 1997 (DF,MB/Birdquest) and a single of the latter was seen well with other migrating birds of prey, in the Tongsa Chu Valley on 21 April 1997 (KDB/VENT). Another new species, **Brahminy Kite** *Haliastur indus*, was seen north of the same locality (a single) on 25 March 1997 (NR). A calling male **Violet Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*, also near Sandrup Jongkhar (c. 450 m elevation) on 1 May (KDB/VENT), was the second Bhutanese record. **Beautiful Nuthatches** *Sitta formosa* seen between Narphang and Deothang in May 1996 (BKi/Kingbird), on 23-24 April 1997 (four; DF,MB/Birdquest) and on 1 May 1997 (four at c. 1,300 m elevation; KDB/VENT) were the second to fourth records and this area now seems well established as a site for this highly sought-after species. Other interesting sightings during the period under review included a female **Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* on the Tsang Chu, below Punakha on 17 April 1997 (KDB/VENT), a single **Black-tailed Crake** *Porzana bicolor* just north of Paro on 14 April 1997 and a male **Blue-capped Redstart** *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus* at Namning (Limithang Road), east Bhutan on 22 March 1997 (NR).

CAMBODIA

Two new species for the country were recorded at Senmonorom, Mondulkiri Province, in December (NvZ): **Eastern Crowned Warbler** *Phylloscopus coronatus* and **Buff-breasted Babbler** *Pellorneum tickelli*. An **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* at Angkor in March 1996 (NvZ) also appears to be a first, as was an almost fully grown young **Brown Wood Owl** *Strix leptogrammica* found for sale in Krakor, near Pursat in April 1996. Other new records (which pre-date those mentioned in Bulletin 25) were **Black-browed Barbet** *Megalaima oorti* at Senmonorom, Mondulkiri in December (NvZ), **Collared Owlet** *Glaucidium brodiei* at Angkor in July 1996 (NvZ) and **Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* at two locations in Mondulkiri in December (NvZ). The same observer provided details of four other new species for the country and, although the dates fall outside the period under review, they are worth reporting: **Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* found for sale in a Phnom Penh bird market in April 1995, **Plain Martins** *Riparia paludicola* at Stung Treng in January 1995 and Tonle Sap (Siem Reap, Kampong Thom) in February 1995 and April 1996, **Wire-tailed Swallow** *Hirundo smithii* at Stung Treng in January 1995 and **Asian House Martin** *Delichon dasypus* at Phnom Penh in February 1995. The sighting of a pair of **Malaysian Plovers** *Charadrius peronii* on Koh Rong Island, Kampong Som in August 1995 confirms the species's occurrence in Cambodia.

CHINA

Hong Kong

The only noteworthy records received were of four **Great Crested Terns** *Sterna bergii* off Hong Kong Island on 14 April 1997 (PL,NR *et al.*) and a single **Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx fugax* at Tai Po Kau on 12 April 1997 (*per* NR).

INDIA

At Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur), a single **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* from 12/13 to at least 23 February (PHo/Sunbird) was a first for the Indian subcontinent, while two **Black-browed Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* on 7 March 1997 (PHi) were a considerable distance south-west of their normal wintering range. Three adult **Siberian Cranes** *Grus leucogeranus* were present last winter, remaining until at least 30 January (MW). A visit to the Manali area, during November/December (AP), turned up a first for Himachal Pradesh, a **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* at 3,000 m elevation and other provincial rarities including **Little Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula westermanni*, **Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* and **Gold-naped Finch** *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta*. Interesting sightings in Harike Bird Sanctuary during spring 1997 (PU), included two firsts for Punjab, a female **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* on 5 April and a **Mountain Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus sindianus* on 30 March. Rarities included two **Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* on 2 March, another **Long-billed Dowitcher** (or the Bharatpur bird ?) on 11 May, a first-year male **Blue-throated Flycatcher** *Cyornis rubeculoides* on 27 April (the first record away from the foothills) and a male **Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* on 29 June. During a visit to Gurdaspur District, north Punjab in the same period (PU), another first for the state was discovered, a male **Streak-throated Woodpecker** *Picus xanthopygaeus* at Dhar on 23 March, with a female there on 19 April. Other noteworthy sightings in this area included single **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *Aquila pomarina* at Dhar on 19 April and Mirthal on 21 April and a pair of **Spangled Drongos** *Dicrurus hottentottus* exhibiting courtship behaviour at Dunera on 20 April. **Variegated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax variegatus* was found at the unusually low altitude of 400 m at Dhar on 21 April. A birdwatching tour of the Goa area in February (IW *et al.*) turned up two species which were to the south of their previously documented Indian range, a single **Rufous-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* by Ponda Meat Factory and a **Rufous-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes phoenicurus* nearby on 16th. Other good sightings during the tour included one or two **Greater Spotted Eagles** *A. clanga* at Carambolim Lake on 11th, another three along the Cumbarjua Canal and two at Carambolim on 20th, three **Common Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius hiaticula* at Santa Cruz on 11th, a single **Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris* at Chorao Island on 19th, four **Slender-billed Gulls** *Larus genei* at Chapora on 9th, with another at Chorao Island on 10th (the latter two have been recorded several times around Goa in recent years) and single **Plain Martins** *Riparia paludicola* at Siolim on 9th and Goa Vehla on 18th. Further south, a single **White-naped Tit** *Parus nuchalis* was reported feeding with a **Great Tit** *P. major* c. 10 km east of Masingaudi, near the eastern limit of Mudumalai National Park on 4 March 1997 (KDB); there are few records from the south and this appears to be the first from Tamil Nadu.

INDONESIA

Sulawesi

An adult **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* was reported from Manado seafront, north Sulawesi on 20 April 1997 (JW).

Sangihe and Talaud

A single **Australian Pratincole** *Stiltia isabella* over Beo, Karakelang Island on 27 February (JW,FV) was new to the island group and probably the most northerly record to date. Also of note was an adult **Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus* at Lirung Harbour, Salibabu Island on 21 January (JW).

Sumatra

Two adult **Woolly-necked Storks** *Ciconia episcopus* were seen over Lubuklinggau City, west Sumatra Selatan on 25 August 1997 (FV); there are few Sumatran records and breeding remains to be confirmed. A singing male **Schneider's Pitta** *Pitta schneideri* was seen well and tape-recorded on Gunung Dempo (*ca.* 1,750 m elevation), south-west Sumatra Selatan, on 26 July 1997 (FV), the first recent record from the mountain. Another male was seen, and photographed, on Gunung Tujuh (1,900 m), east of Gunung Kerinchi in early August 1996 (JH). Other interesting sightings of under-recorded species included a male **Graceful Pitta** *P. venusta* at Tandai (900 m), Kerinchi-Seblat National Park on 30 May 1996 (JH), a single **Red-billed Partridge** *Arborophila rubrirostris* on Gunung Tujuh (2,600 m) in July/August 1997 (FV); also a high-elevation record, a male **Giant Pitta** *P. caerulea* seen and photographed in secondary forest at Tandai (800 m) on 25 July 1996 (JH); apparently the first this century, a singing **Marbled Wren Babbler** *Napothera marmorata* (at *ca.* 1,500 m) and a single **Large Hawk Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx sparverioides* on Bukit Kaba, Bengkulu on 30 July 1997 (FV) and a **Scaly-breasted Bulbul**

Pycnonotus squamatus near Kubuperahu, Barisan Selatan National Park, Lampung on 19 July 1997 (FV). Several **White-winged Ducks** *Cairina scutulata*, observed in freshwater swamp forest at Sindang Silaut, south of Tapan, Sumatra Barat/ Bengkulu, on several dates during December-January (FFI), were also of great interest.

LAOS

The steady flow of new species for the country continues, with the following five additions in early 1997: a single **Speckled Wood Pigeon** *Columba hodgsonii* in Nam Ha (West) proposed protected area, Luang Namtha Province, west N Laos on 13 February (PD), two **Swinhoe's Snipe** *Gallinago megala* reported from near the Cambodian border in Dong Khanthung proposed protected area, Champassak Province, S Laos on 29 March (JWo), two singing **Pied Fantails** *Rhipidura javanica* on the eastern outskirts of Vientiane on 11 April (PD,JT) and again in late June (RT), a single **Chestnut Thrush** *Turdus rubrocanus* in Nam Ha (East) PPA, Luang Namtha in mid-March (JWo) and at least ten singing **Russet Bush Warblers** *Bradypterus seebohmi* in Nam Ha (West) PPA on 25-26 February (PD). Confirmation of the occurrence of a further three species came with news of a single **Spotted Wood Owl** *Strix seloputo*, heard at Han Khong, Champassak Province, S Laos on 26 May (PD), a singing **Spotted Wren Babbler** *Spelaeornis formosus* along the Nam Thang in the proposed north extension of Nakai-Nam Theun National Biodiversity Conservation Area, Bolikhamsay Province, C Laos on 4 May (JT) and at least 14 **Asian Golden Weavers** *Ploceus hypoxanthus* in Dong Khanthung PPA in March/April (JWo). Also, during this period, a number of interesting range extensions were noted. **Indian Nightjar** *Caprimulgus asiaticus* in Nam Kan-Nam Ngao proposed protected area, Bokeo Province, west N Laos during 9-23 April (EP *et al.*) was new for N Laos. New records for C Laos were: a single **VON Schrenck's Bittern** *Ixobrychus eurhythmus* at Nam Chat on 26 April and another two at Nam Thang on 5 May, both in the proposed north extension of Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA (JT,PD,WR), single **Indochinese Green Magpies** *Cissa hypoleuca* in both the last-mentioned areas on 28 April (PD) and 4 May (JT) respectively, an apparently courting pair of **Sapphire Flycatchers** *Ficedula sapphira* along the upper Nam Xot, Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA on 16 March (PD,JT) and **Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill** *Paradoxornis atrosuperciliaris* in Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA in February/March (JT). **Tawny Fish Owl** *Ketupa flavipes* was confirmed for this region with the sighting of a single individual at Nam Thang in the proposed north extension of Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA on 4 May (JT). New species for S Laos were: a **Spot-bellied Eagle Owl** *Bubo nipalensis* seen in Dong Ampham National Biodiversity Conservation Area, Attapu Province, east S Laos on 2 January, with others heard on 1 and 13 January (JWo,PD), up to 30 **Yellow-vented Pigeons** *Treron seimundi* feeding in a fruiting tree at the same site during January (WR), a single (probably fourth-year) **Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* in Dong Khanthung PPA on 28 March (JWo) and **Hooded Pitta** *Pitta sordida*, which was found to be common, with many birds on territory, in Dong Ampham NBCA during May (PD). Noteworthy records of regionally threatened species included a single **Great Thick-knee** *Esacus recurvirostris* along the Mekong, c. 75 km west of Vientiane (by road) in early June 1997 (RT) and a single **River Tern** *Sterna aurantia* c. 9 km west of Vientiane (by road) on 21 December (PD,RT,JWo), a pair of **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* captured by local people in Pakxe, Scukhan district during July/August 1997 (WR,PD) and, best of all, a pair of **Black-necked Storks** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in Dong Khanthung PPA on 1 April 1997 (JWo); this was the first recent record but local people reported them as breeding there. In the Don Khone area, by the Cambodian border in Champassak Province, S Laos, three species of vulture were recorded at Ban Hang Khone on 23 February (PC): six **White-rumped** *Gyps bengalensis*, at least one **Long-billed** *G. indicus* and at least four **Red-headed** *Sarcogyps calvus*, and local people claimed that they breed close by, inside Cambodia. At least three **Woolly-necked Storks** *Ciconia episcopus* and a pair of **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* were also seen around the same time (PC). On the Attapu Plain, Attapu Province, S Laos, there were six **White-rumped Vultures** (RT) and up to three **Red-headed Vultures** (RT,PD) during May 1997. Up to six breeding pairs of **Jerdon's Bushchat** *Saxicola jerdoni* along the Nam Chat, in the proposed north extension of Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA, during 25 April-5 May 1997 (PD *et al.*) were the first recorded from C Laos and there were also at least eight singing males along the

Mekong, c. 75 km west of Vientiane, N Laos on 9 February (RT,JT), with at least six, including a pair feeding fledged juveniles, at the same location on 17 April 1997 (PD,JWo,SR); there are no records from NE Thailand, across the river. Other interesting species, seen during early 1997, included an adult male **Masked Finfoot** *Heliopais personata* along the Xe Kaman, in Dong Ampham NBCA on 19 May (PD), breeding **Blyth's Kingfishers** *Alcedo hercules* in Nam Ha (West) PPA, during February/March (PD,JWo,RT), several **Chestnut-headed Tesias** *Tesia castaneocoronata* at the same locality during February (PD); the second recent record from N Laos, at least four **Short-tailed Scimitar Babblers** *Jabouilleia danjoui*, including a pair on territory, at Nam Chat in the proposed north extension of Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA on 29 April-2 May (JT,PD), two **Short-tailed Parrotbills** *P. davidianus* in Nam Ha (West) PPA on 28 February (PD) and others in the nearby Nam Kan-Nam Ngao PPA during 9-23 April (EP *et al.*) and **Plain-backed Sparrow** *Passer flaveolus* at the latter locality during the same period (EP *et al.*).

NEPAL

Two new species records for the country were received (pending confirmation): a single **Rufous-tailed Wheatear** *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* by the Karnali River, five kilometres above Chisapani on 24 October 1996 (LB-R), and at least two **Singing Bushlarks** *Mirafra cantillans* in Sukila Phanta Wildlife Reserve, during 8-19 May 1996 (HB), with up to 15 (including several singing) there during 10-22 May 1997 (HB,BM). At least 10 **Black-and-yellow Grosbeaks** *Mycerobas icterioides* were observed on the east side of Rara Lake on 26-27 March 1997 (TG) and were also noted collecting nest material; only the second Nepali record and the first evidence of breeding. Other rarities included a single **Black-capped Kingfisher** *Halcyon pileata* along the Sukebar Khola, about seven kilometres up-stream of Meghauli, Chitwan National Park on 5 February (PHi), a female **Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* at Kosi Barrage on 17-18 (SM,HC,TG,RK,SB,CG) and 21 (SS) February 1997 and another bird at Jagdishpur Reservoir, Kapilvastu District on 3 March 1997 (SS), the third and fourth records and a male **Siberian Blue Robin** *Luscinia cyane* in Dharan forest (450 m elevation) on 27 March 1997 (BC,HC), the third record. A male **Jerdon's Bushchat** *Saxicola jerdoni* near Rani Tal marshes on 2,7 and 18 January, with a female-plumaged bird also present on the former two dates (HB) was the first winter record from Nepal and only the fourth ever. Later, a pair were seen near Jhilmila on 12 March 1997 (TG) and an adult and a pair with two dependent fledged young were seen close to Shikari Tal on 22 May 1997 (HB,BM), the first breeding record from Nepal. At least three **Bristled Grassbirds** *Chaetornis striatus*, another scarce resident, were seen in Sukila Phanta WR during 10-15 May 1996 (HB), with up to seven there on 20-22 May 1997 (HB,BM) and a single was also seen near Kushaha, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve on 1 November 1996 (HC). A single **White-bellied Yuhina** *Yuhina zantholeuca* west of Bamni Nala, Sukila Phanta WR on 7 (HB,DM) and 16 January 1997 (HB), represents the most westerly record to date. A male **Asian Paradise-flycatcher** *Terpsiphone paradisi* near Silent Safari Camp, Sukila Phanta WR during 7-14 January (HB), was only the second mid-winter record from Nepal. Two **Little Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius dubius* at Jomsom on 22 February (HB,PA-B) were at unusually high elevation, while new low-elevation records were set for **Gould's Shortwing** *Brachypteryx stellata*, with a single between Garuwa and Sukhani forests (450 m), lower Mai Valley, on 18 March 1997 (HC,EL) and **Blue-capped Redstart** *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus*, with a male close to the Dhungre River (150 m), near Sauraha, Chitwan, on 1 February (BM).

PAKISTAN

A single **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in Islamabad on 27 September 1996 (JK,MP) was the first for the country, while a **Black-capped Kingfisher** *Halcyon pileata* in Karachi on 18 January (JK) was the second record and in the same place where the first was seen two years previously! A **Black-throated Accentor** *Prunella atrogularis* in Karachi on 21 January (JK) was some distance south of its normal wintering range. Three **Orange-headed Thrushes** *Zoothera citrina* in Islamabad on 18 February (JK,MP,TR) were the first winter records in Pakistan. An **Ashy Prinia** *Prinia socialis* at Dera Ismail Khan on 20 February (JK) was the first for NWFP. Other good records included a single **Speckled Piculet** *Picumnus innominatus* near Murree (2,000 m elevation) on 2 March 1997 (JK), an adult **Lesser Spotted Eagle**

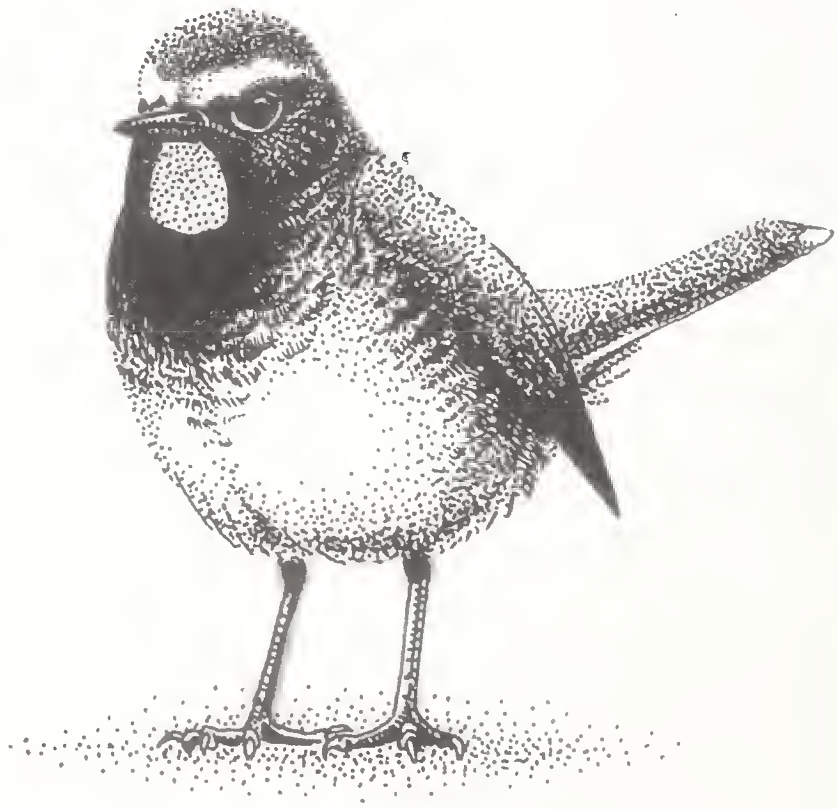
Aquila pomarina at Dera Ismail Khan on 25 October 1996 (JK), a **Golden-spectacled Warbler** *Seicercus burkii* in Islamabad on 28 February (JK) and about 20 **Red-billed Leiothrixes** *Leiothrix lutea* in Islamabad on 15 November (JK,MP,BS); part of a surprising influx there.

PHILIPPINES

A **Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* at Hamut Camp, Los Dos Cuernos, Isabella Province, north Luzon on 21 February (BG) was apparently a first for the Philippines. Two new species for Bohol, a single **Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus* and a **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*, were seen offshore on 12 January (BG) and a sighting of single **Silvery Kingfisher** *Alcedo argentata* in Raja Sikatuna National Park, Bohol on 16-17 March 1997 (DV,RDr,IM), with a pair there on 23 March (PH) provided welcome confirmation of the species's continued survival on the island. An immature **Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* was seen at Pagbilao Fish Ponds, Luzon in March/April 1997 (DV,RDr,IM), suggesting breeding there. A visit to Mount Hamut, Los Dos Cuernos on 21-22 May 1997 (FL) produced several interesting breeding records: an adult **Cream-bellied Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus merrilli* attending a nest with a single egg, a pair of **Ashy-breasted Flycatchers** *Muscicapa randi* feeding young and an adult **Long-billed Rhabdornis** *Rhabdornis grandis* repeatedly entering a nest-hole; the former two may be the first breeding records. Another unusual sighting here was of a calling **Luzon Bleeding-heart** *Gallicolumba luzonica* with entirely red breast to vent.

THAILAND

A single **Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* at Nong Bong Khai, Chiang Rai from 9 December (CS,CSr,SSo,TT) to 1 January (WT/RFD,BCST) was the first for Thailand and SE Asia and a first-winter **Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*, seen and photographed by the Mekong River at Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai on 9 January (DV,RDr,IM) and still present on 17th (JC,RD,BK *et al.*) and 28th (KR), was also a first for Thailand. A total of eight **Chinese Bush Warblers** *Bradypterus tacsanowskius* were netted, a single at Mae Taeng Irrigation Project site on 30 November and the rest around Chiang Saen, during 11 December to 1 January (WT/RFD); the second to ninth Thai records and evidence that it winters. Three **White-tailed Rubythroats** *Luscinia pectoralis* were also netted during 7-8 December, with two re-trapped later in the month, also suggesting wintering in the area; there is only one previous Thai record, from near Bangkok in 1925. Sightings of **Great Thick-knee** *Esacus recurvirostris* and **River Tern** *Sterna aurantia* from the Laos bank of the Mekong (see that section) must also count as significant recent records for Thailand and the former, at least, was seen to land on the Thai side. Another rarity, a female **Golden Bush Robin** *Tarsiger chrysaeus*, was seen at the edge of the summit marsh on Doi Inthanon, Chiang Mai on 24 December (PA,EA). **House Sparrows** *Passer domesticus* have now reached Bangkok, where two males and many females and young were seen around Suan Rommaneenart, Banglampoo on 4 January (WP,KR,BCST staff). Rare ducks were in evidence last winter, with two **Gadwall** *Anas strepera* at Nong Bong Khai, Chiang Rai during 26-31 December (WT/RFD) and three there from 1 to 8 January (TT,DV,RDr,IM), 30 **Spot-billed Ducks** *A. poecilorhyncha* on the Mekong River in Maeng District, Nong Khai, NE Thailand on 30 December (RJ), a male **Baikal Teal** *A. formosa* at Kasetsart University, Kamphaengsaen, Nakhon Pathom, near Bangkok on 17 January (WS) and a male **Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* at Chiang Saen Lake, Chiang Rai on 2 March (JND). Interesting raptors included



White-tailed Rubythroat Luscinia pectoralis *by Michael O'Clery* three **Cinereous Vultures** *Aegypius monachus* reported from Phanom Sarakham District, Chachoengsao in late December (one was shot and another captured) and another (or the last of the three) caught by local people in Kanchanaburi on 28 January (*per* BCST) (previous records are from the NE and peninsula only), a first winter **Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*, seen and photographed in Cha-am District, Phetchaburi on 20 February (SK) and a pale morph **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*, reported from Chiang Saen Lake on 28 January (KR). Other interesting records during the period under review included a single **Mrs Hume's Pheasant** *Syrmaticus humiae*, reported from near the summit of Doi Lunggaluang, Khun Jae National Park, Wiang Pa Phao District, Chiang Rai on 21 February (SH,AJ), about ten **White-bellied Green Pigeons** *Treron sieboldii* accompanying **Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons** *T. sphenura* on Doi Pha Hom Pok on 30 December (TT), a single **Pied Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula bicolor* found dead at km 28 in Kaeng Krachan National Park, Phetchaburi on 5 December (UT) (unusual inland but previously reported verbally from south W Thailand), two **Beach Thick-knees** *Esacus neglectus* seen (one photographed) on Hat Mai Ngaam, Ko Surin National Park, Ranong on 22 February (PDe) (one of the last remaining Thai sites), a flock of 50 **Spot-winged Starlings** *Saroglossa spiloptera* in Tinoui District, Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary, W Thailand on 2 February (TT), a single **Yellow-streaked Warbler** *Phylloscopus armandii* at Dun Lamphan, Na Chuak District, Maha Sarakham, central NE Thailand on 25 December (RJ,UT), a single **Lemon-rumped Warbler** *P. chloronotus* at only c. 455 m elevation at Wat Pha Ngao, near Chiang Rai on 1 January (WT/RFD), four or five **Rufous-throated Fulvettas** *Alcippe rufogularis* in Phu Luang Wildlife Sanctuary, Loei on 7 December (KS) and three or four **Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbills** *Paradoxornis atrosuperciliaris*, reported from the Den Ya Khat area of Doi Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary on 30 December (KS).

VIETNAM

Javan Frogmouth *Batrachostomus javensis* was seen well and tape-recorded in Cat Tien National Park, Dong Nai, Cochinchina on 21 April 1997 (JE), the first record from Vietnam. Four new species for E Tonkin were recorded in spring 1997: a single **Great Crested Tern** *Sterna bergii* and about 1,000 **Grey-tailed Tattlers** *Heteroscelus brevipes* at Xuan Thuy, Red River Delta on 25 May (JE), a **Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo** *Carpococcyx renauldi* heard calling in Cuc Phuong National Park, Ha Nam Ninh on 31 May/1 June (JE,FL) and a **Fairy Pitta** *Pitta nympha* at Tam Dao, Vinh Phu on 11 May (JE). **Oriental Scops Owl** *Otus sunia*, which was heard every night in Cuc Phuong NP during 29 March-3 April 1997 (TP *et al.*), may also be the first from the region. No less than 27 **Spoon-billed Sandpipers** *Calidris pygmeus* were counted at Xuan Thuy, Red River Delta on 28 February (JE), the highest count to date, and 19 were still there on 4 April 1997 (TP *et al.*). A colony of at least 100 **Brown Boobies** *Sula leucogaster* was found on Con Dao, Hau Giang, Cochinchina in spring 1997 (JE); the species is an extremely local breeder in South-East Asia. Following occasional sightings at a single location in Cat Tien National Park, Cochinchina, since 1991, **Orange-necked Partridge** *Arborophila davidi* was found over a wider area of the park ('everywhere on hills') during spring 1997 (*per* JE). At nearby Cat Loc Nature Reserve it was found to be common during 6-13 April, with 27 sighting in four days (JE,RDe *et al.*). **Orange-bellied Leafbird** *Chloropsis hardwickii*, **Large Niltava** *Niltava grandis* and **Black-chinned Yuhina** *Yuhina nigrimenta* at only c. 450 m in Cuc Phuong NP during 29 March-3 April 1997 (TP *et al.*), were all at unusually low altitude. Survey work undertaken for the Darwin

Fairy Pitta Pitta nympha *by Michael O'Clery*

Melaleuca Wetlands Project in U Minh Thuong (peat dome) Nature Reserve, Kien Giang Province, Cochinchina in 1997 (RS), resulted in some very interesting findings, with a single captive **Grass Owl** *Tyto capensis* in June (taken from the reserve), at least 1,000 **Bronze-winged Jacanas** *Metopidius indicus* (many breeding) in February, a single **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* on 17 February, c. 500 **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* nests, up to five **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (breeding suspected) and ten occupied **Asian Openbill** *Anastomus oscitans* nests (100+ reported by reserve director), all in June, and up to three **Woolly-necked Storks** *Ciconia episcopus* and up to six **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* (latter reported to breed) seen on most days in February and June; **Sarus Crane** *Grus antigone* was reported to be an occasional visitor. Surveys were also carried out at U Minh Ha (peat dome), including Vo Doi Nature Reserve, Cau Mau Province (formerly southern part of Minh Hai), Cochinchina, where there was a female **Spot-billed Duck** *Anas poecilorhyncha* with young (Vo Doi), as well as two **Woolly-necked Storks** and a single **Lesser Adjutant**, all in February. On the Ha Tien Plain, Kien Giang, a hunter produced feathers of a **Bengal Florican** *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, killed there 2-3 years previously, four captive **Woolly-necked Storks** were found at Kien Luong (recently taken from a nest on the plain) and flocks of over 100 **Sarus Cranes** were reported to occur in the dry season (including 1997) by local people. The same observer (RS) also found **Black-naped Terns** *S. sumatrana* breeding commonly on limestone islands in the Gulf of Thailand at Hon Chong, Kien Giang in June.

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Great Pied Hornbill Buceros bicornis *by Arlene Rosenthal*

Recently published

Wings in the Wetlands: A Photographic Portfolio, by Dr T. S. U. de Zylva. Victor Hasselblad Wildlife Trust (Sri Lanka), 1996. ISBN 955-619-004-X.

Wings in the Wetlands is a colourful photographic illustration of the birds of Sri Lanka. It is not the first time that the author has published a work on Sri Lankan birds. Earlier, in 1984, he published *Portraits of Sri Lankan Birds* and this latest book is a delightful addition to the collection of books on birds on this Indian Ocean island. The two photographic guides by Dr de Zylva cover around 125 species, over a quarter of the birds recorded in Sri Lanka.

Over 60 species of birds which are usually associated with wetlands are portrayed in colour photographs. The photographs cover both common and rarer species and the book contains 113 colour photographs set in 143 pages with a glossary of names and technical notes of photographic equipment used. As in his earlier volume, Dr de Zylva provides accompanying commentaries and titles for the photographs in a lighter vein. Often he details the circumstances under which the photographs were taken, drawing on his life-long experience as Sri Lanka's foremost ornithological photographer. The quality of the photographs is truly outstanding. This is an excellent book not only for the keen birdwatcher but also for the beginner in the field of ornithology. The photographs are also a clear reminder to the policy-makers that apart from the economic and ecological value of marshes and wetlands they are also worth preserving for, amongst other things, their avian beauty and splendour. This book amply demonstrates that these beautiful creatures are an invaluable sustainable resource with huge touristic and recreational potential.

The book is published at a time when wetlands are seriously threatened by haphazard development activities in the name of economic progress such as prawn farms, salt pans and land reclamation for agriculture, highways, houses and factories. Therefore, it is highly opportune to portray the beauty of these waterside birds against the backdrop of their aquatic habitats and thereby focus attention on the urgent need to protect and preserve these wetland habitats.

Clevo Wilson

Hong Kong Bird Report 1995, ed. Geoff Carey. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, 1996. 260 pp. ISSN 1017-118.

Once again, the HKBWS have produced a magnificent bird report, and this is the biggest issue to date. As usual a large portion of the report is devoted to the systematic list of birds recorded in 1995, but there is an ever-increasing number of papers related to identification and taxonomic problems, censuses, ringing reports and of course descriptions of new species for Hong Kong – the number of new species being found in Hong Kong still shows no sign of diminishing. The centrepiece of this year's report, however, is a 50-page paper on 'Forest birds of Southeast China' which will surely become a standard reference for some time. The report is, as always, well produced and graced with several pages of colour. It is an essential purchase for anyone with an interest in Chinese birds.

Nigel Redman

A Field Guide to the Birds of Southwestern India by R. J. Ranjit Daniels. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997. xi + 217 pp, 63 plates (mostly in colour). ISBN 0 19 563726 7.

South-western India mainly comprises the Western Ghats and is home to a fascinating and often unique avifauna. Although the area is comparatively poor in passerine species there are about twenty endemics and a number of other species which are shared only with Sri Lanka. Although Salim Ali's *Birds of Kerala* covered many of the birds, this is the first field guide devoted specifically to the whole region.

The introduction covers just twenty pages and the bulk of the book is devoted to the species accounts. A total of 508 species is described (although numbered according to Ripley's *Synopsis*). Species accounts deal with identification, call, range and habitat. The text is invariably rather brief and although much useful information is included, I found many of the more difficult species to be lacking in detail. The plates are grouped together at the end and are variable in quality. The style is decidedly simplistic and lacks accurate portrayal of shape and jizz. They do, however, highlight key features and could be useful if used with care. Some plates are simply crude line drawings and those of the owls and nightjars in particular will be useless in the field.

Overall, this book is well produced and a handy size for taking in the field. However, birders will still need additional sources of reference to identify some of the birds and it is a shame that the opportunity was not taken to produce a really good field guide. Hopefully this book will at least help stimulate an interest in the birds of this wonderful area.

Nigel Redman

Birds of the Hengduan Mountains, ed. Tang Chanzhu. Science Press, Beijing, 1996. ISBN 7 03 004561 0 [in Chinese].

This is a comprehensive, 546-page account of the birds of China's biggest north-south mountain range, covering 500,000 km^2 of north-west Yunnan, south-east Tibet and south-west Sichuan. Much of the region is 4,000 m above sea level and is remote and geologically complex. This survey lists 585 birds, or about half of the Chinese total, including a large number of endemics and several globally threatened species. The accounts of Galliformes and Gruiformes are among the most detailed, with three pages devoted to the three subspecies of White Eared-pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon* found in the region, for example. Many species are clearly under threat in the Hengduan mountains, with probably none more so than Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*. Although Anderson saw flocks of 600 or more in western Yunnan around 1870, in recent years only a few dead birds have been found, the survey reports. The region is rich in babblers, with 74 species recorded, including the globally threatened Black-breasted Parrotbill *Paradoxornis flavirostris* (which incidentally is not listed as occurring in China in *Birds to Watch 2*). Other globally threatened passerines listed include Yunnan *Sitta yunnanensis* and Giant Nuthatch *S. magna* and Sichuan Jay *Perisoreus internigrans*. This vast region includes 21 nature reserves, the largest covering over 375,000 ha, but the book notes that illegal hunting continues even in these supposedly protected areas. This survey is a pioneering account of a little known region, and the authors are to be congratulated on producing a book that is full of fascinating information.

Michael Rank

A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea, by B. J. Coates, K. D. Bishop and D. Gardner. Dove Publications, NSW, 1997. 64 plates, 535pp. ISBN 0 9590257 3 1.

At last a new bird book which covers all the birds between New Guinea and Borneo has been released. It starts with a introduction to the flora, fauna and geology of each of the larger islands in Wallacea, followed by a brief description of each bird habitat from grasslands to montane rainforests. The book provides the reader with interesting new information about bird migration in the region and distribution of endemic birds in each habitat, together with 4 appendices in which the endemics of each major island are listed.

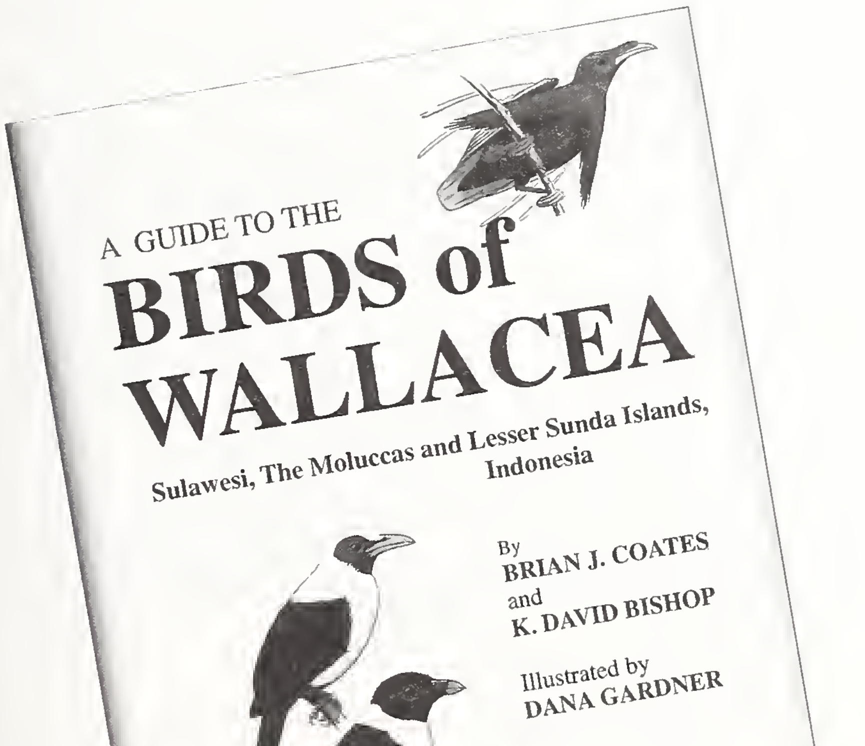
The illustrations on the plates are to a very high standard although I think it would be better to have the whole bird depicted more consistently. Each species is described in the associated text, together with some details of races and immature plumages. One could point out that the descriptions are very brief, but I do not think that this will cause any identification problems.

As with many books, this one has in my opinion some design problems. First, the numbering system is confusing and it takes time to go from page to page to read the descriptions and follow the numbers of each illustrated bird which range from 1 to 696. The text in the back only deals with habitats, status, range and voice, while descriptions are alongside the plates. It would have been more appropiate to include the descriptions with the other information, separate from the plates. Additionally, it would have been better to use low numbers for each plate and have all the names on the opposite page. Consequently, I would have preferred the style and format of, say, the *Birds of New Guinea* in which 300 pages are used to illustrate and discuss 740 birds, versus 530 pages to illustrate and discuss 700 birds from Wallacea. More space I feel could have been given to describing the various races which occur.

There are some omissions in the text. For example, the Chattering Lories I observed on Halmahera had a large yellow patch on the mantle or back, a feature which apparently should only be present on the race of this species found on Obi and Bacan. There is no information given about the appearance of the unidentified scops owl *Otus* sp. which has now been seen well by several birders on the island of Sumba. Only a description of the voice is given.

There is also some discrepancy with descriptions given in other published works. For example, in Holmes & Phillipps *Birds of Sulawesi* the female Grey-sided Flowerpecker *Dicaeum celebicum* is shown with a purple-blue tail, whilst here it is illustrated and described as having a grey tail. Neither field guide gives any indication whether females or young birds have purple tails.

However, overall this is a great book which will be a good companion on future trips to this region. It is printed on good quality white paper and it is so beautiful and heavy that it might be thought a great pity to take it out into the humid rainforest. However, it is the only field guide to large parts of Wallacea and must be considered absolutely essential.



I have no doubt that reading this book will inspire you to go to Wallacea. After all, time is running out for many of the beautiful and endangered endemics of the region.

Niels Dreyer

Conserving Indonesian Biodiversity: the Endemic Bird Area Approach. PHPA/BirdLife Indonesia Programme, Bogor, 1995. 221pp.

The 17,000 islands that stretch across the Indonesian archipelago are home to more species of endemic birds than any other nation. Its 381 recognised endemics can be compared with only 109 in Peru, 177 in Brazil and 183 in the Philippines. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that BirdLife International has invested considerable resources into developing their programme in this very important country. This recent book is a culmination of many years research into the distribution of Indonesia's birds and is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the rich avifauna of the archipelago or with conservation of its biodiversity. One of the book's principal aims is to raise awareness amongst Indonesian decision-makers and protected area and wildlife managers, and it is therefore bilingual, with Indonesian and English text on opposite pages.

Chapter 1 provides a summary of biodiversity conservation in Indonesia, and links this to the obligations and steps that need to be taken to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (ratified by Indonesia in 1994). A useful review of Indonesian legislation related to conservation of biodiversity is also presented, and the concept of priority areas for conservation is introduced. This concept is developed further in Chapter 2, which outlines the Endemic Bird Area (EBA) approach to the identification of biodiversity hot spots. For those not familiar with this concept, this chapter is a useful introduction to the science behind BirdLife's global biodiversity strategy. The following chapter is a discussion of the likely impacts of national development plans on EBAs.

The bulk of this publication, and probably of most interest to most OBC members, is found in Chapter 4. This provides an overview of the distribution of endemic and restricted-range species in the Indonesian archipelago, using the EBA concept as a means to identify the most important biodiversity hotspots in the archipelago. For each of the 24 EBAs identified, data are presented in tabular form on the species present, their habitat preferences and altitudinal range. This information is compared to the existing provision of conservation areas, and a brief analysis of the threats. Recommendations relating to improvement of the protected area system are made throughout the book, particularly in relation to gazetting the many proposed protected areas in Indonesia. In addition, the most important conservation action points are outlined at the beginning of each of the 24 accounts. An Appendix also provides the reader with a complete list of the 402 restricted-range birds occurring in Indonesia, these being species with a natural range of less than 50,000 km^2.

Frank Lambert

Goa: The Independent Birder's Guide and **The Birds of Goa: a Complete Checklist** by Peter Harris. Eastern Publications, 1996. ISBN 0 9529181 0 2. Price £14.50 (guide) and £2.00 (checklist). *Available from the author, Eastern Publications, 11 North Parade, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4PA, UK*

The old Portuguese enclave of Goa on India's west coast is an increasingly popular destination for visiting birders. For some, it offers a comparatively gentle introduction to Indian birding, while others aim to combine an exotic holiday with some excellent birding. The author, Peter Harris, has spent a total of 2 years in Goa and his knowledge of the area is evident in this very thorough, complete and competently produced guide. Introductory sections cover background information on Goa, suggesting where the best areas are to go birding.

I have a few minor quibbles. The layout is a little disappointing given the standard of most computer word-processing packages available now, with rather crowded-looking pages. More detail could perhaps have been given to the identification hints, which, while covering some comparatively easy groups like 'Goldenback' (Flameback) Woodpeckers, omits more problematical groups like *Phylloscopus* warblers. The detail in other sections may be excessive even for the most novice of birders/travellers.

Nevertheless, this is about as good as home-produced birding guides get, and I would not hesitate to recommend it to anyone planning a trip to Goa.

Seb Buckton

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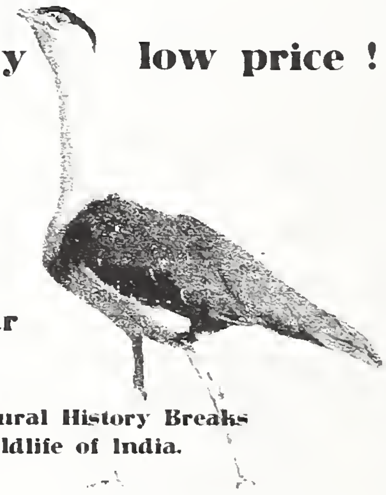

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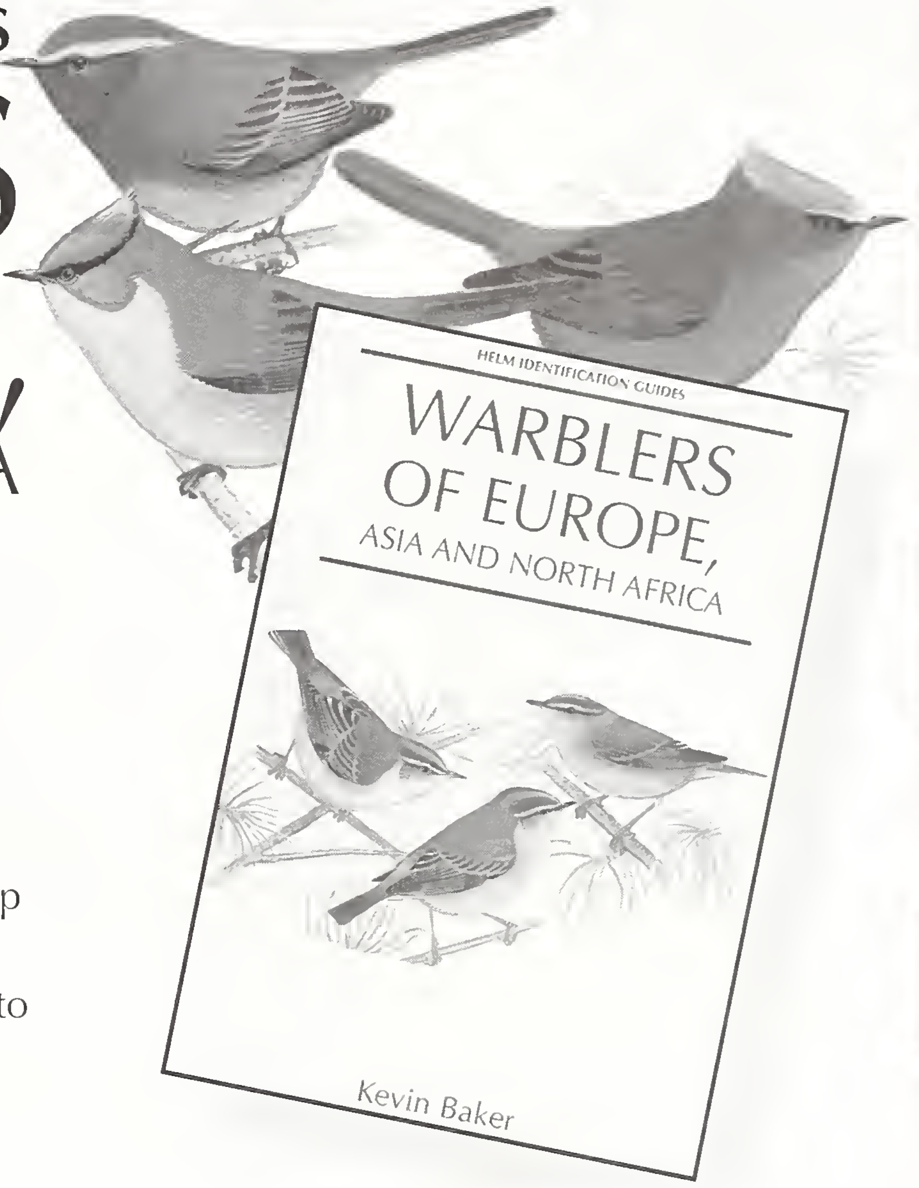

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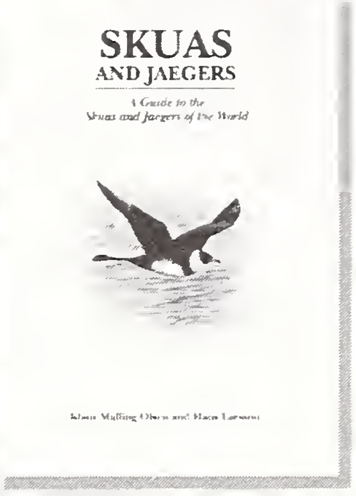

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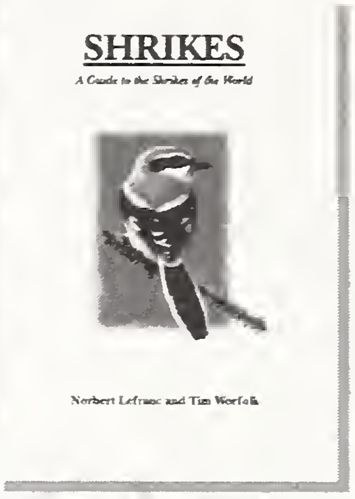

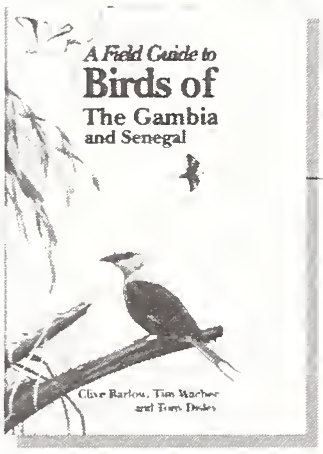

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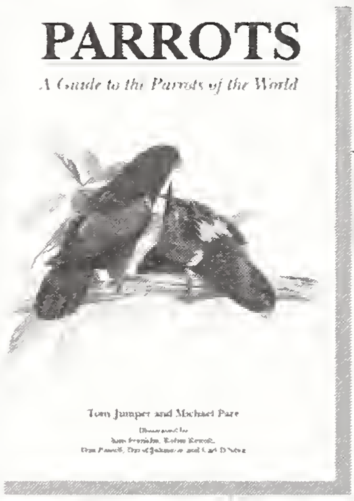

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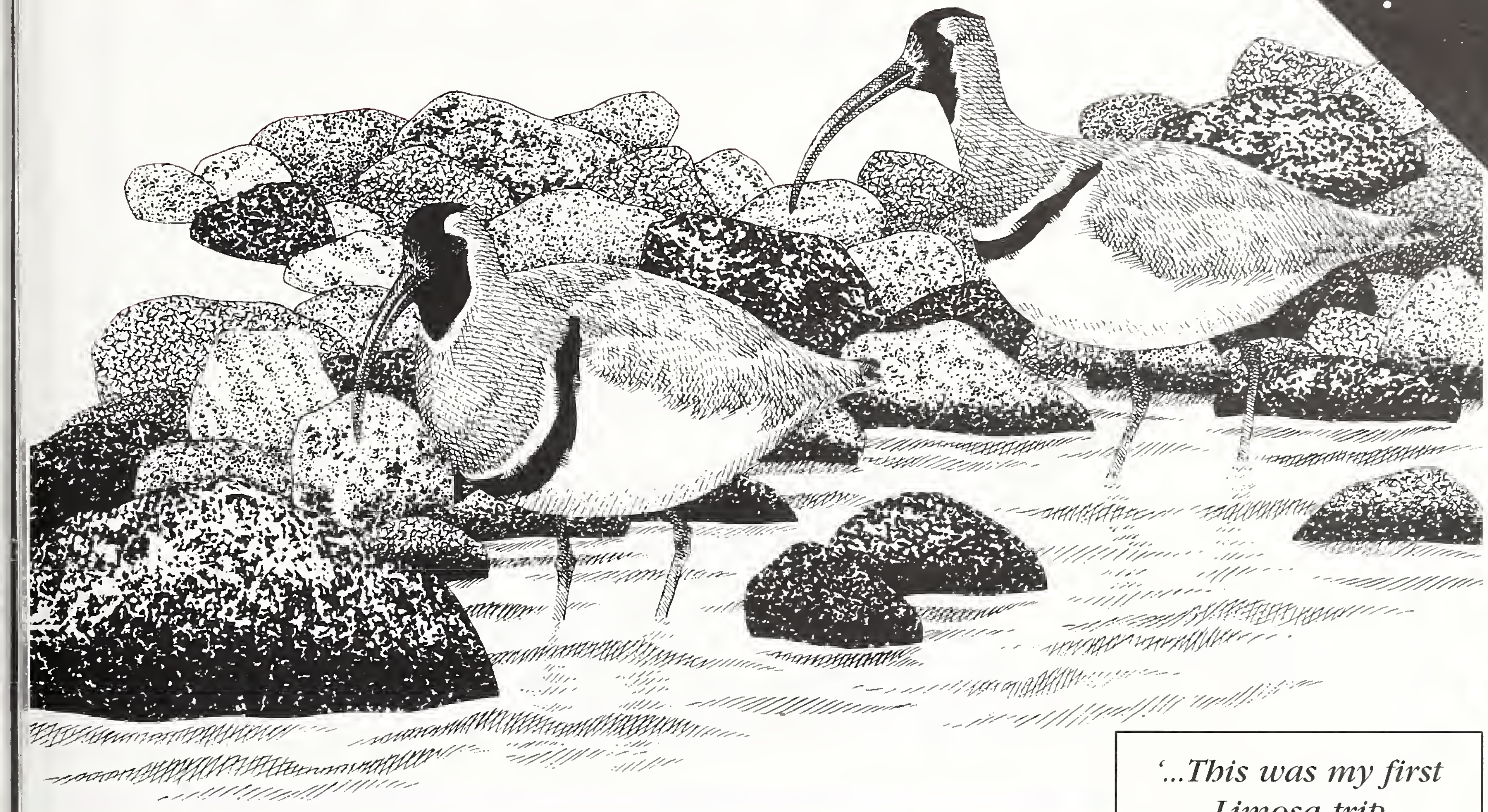

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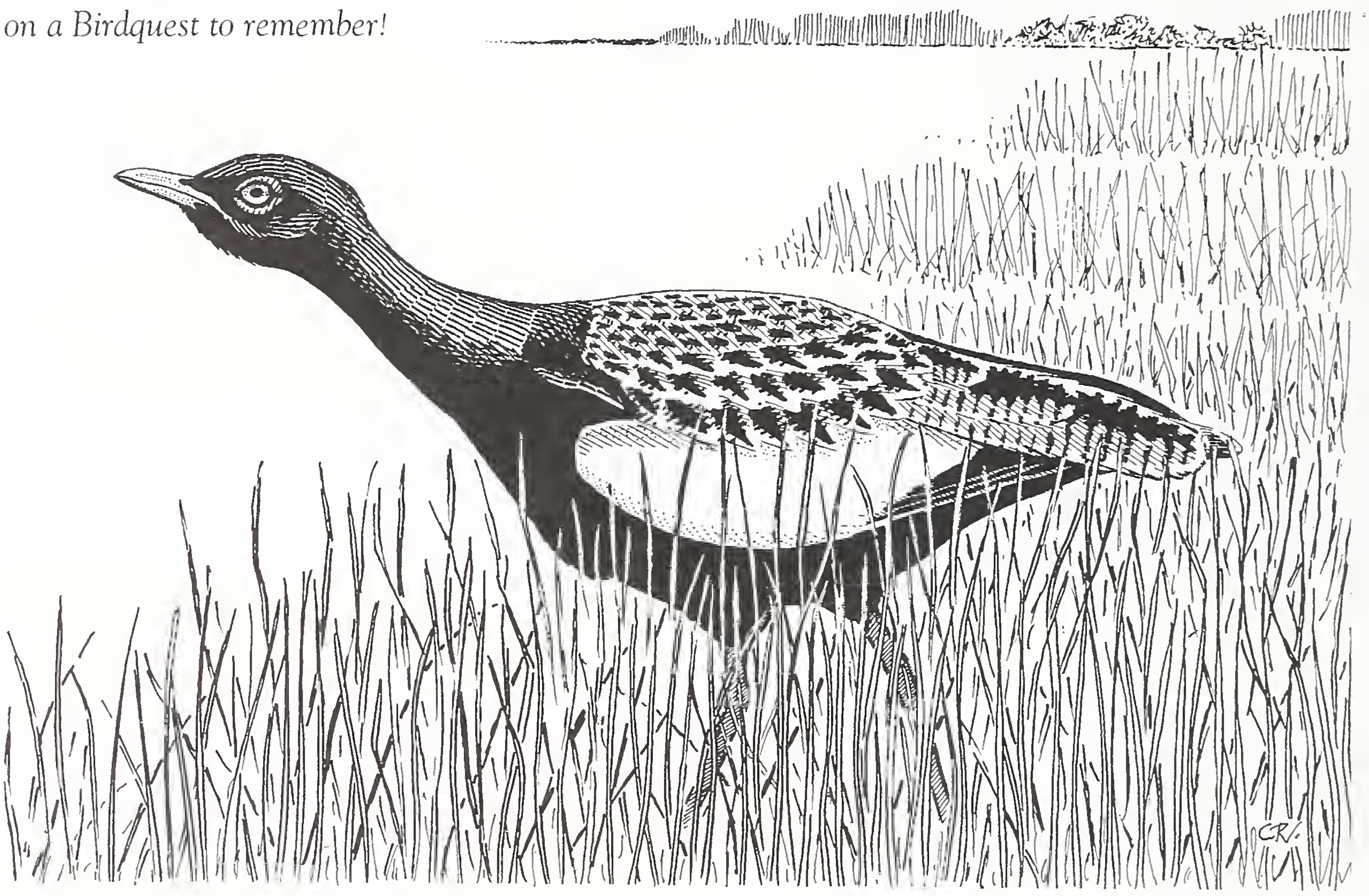

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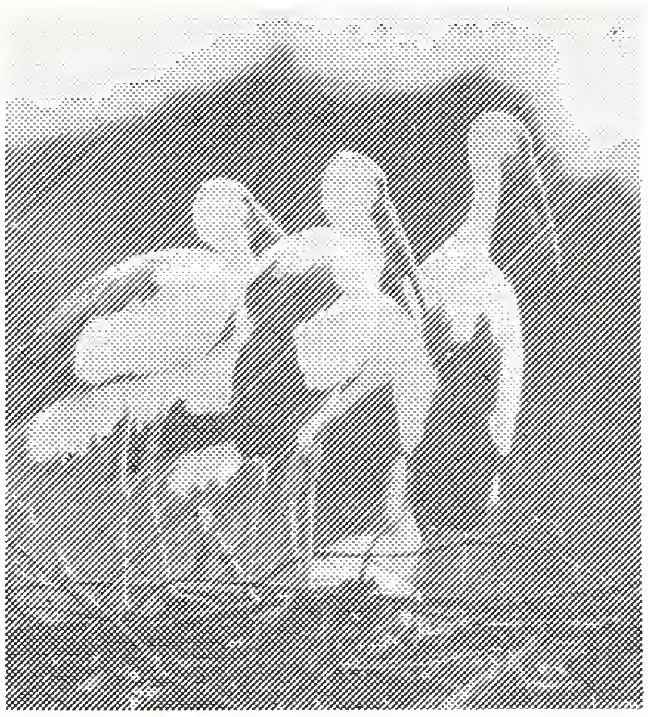

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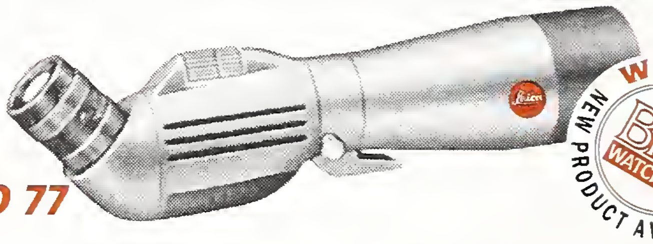

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